

ACME

SUMMER NO. 13

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MAGAZINE OF
HORROR

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**ALMOST
IMMORTAL**

by
AUSTIN HALL

•
**THE THING
IN THE HOUSE**

by
H. F. SCOTTEN

•
**VALLEY OF
THE LOST**

by
ROBERT E. HOWARD

•
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The Bizarre and The Unusual

Volume 3

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Robert A. W. Lowndes, Editor

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Introduction

To some of you, this issue of **Magazine of Horror** will be an introduction to imaginative literature, dealing with matters strange, fearful, fantastic, etc., but not within the realm of science fiction. To most of you, MOH has become a friend of some years standing, and you have missed us because of the long time between issue Number 12 and this one.

It is not my province to tell you how good our magazine is; I not only believe, I know that it is good — but how good is something that you have to tell me. For a magazine can be good, but not good enough to attain a substantial circulation. This, as we know, is the reason why some "good" magazines have not lasted very long.

But there can be other reasons in these times why a small magazine (after all, we are not **Life** or **Playboy**!) has difficulty in growing, and one of them is simply the matter of getting the copies on to newsstands. We have mentioned this before, and the problem is still with us.

You can help, if you want to — that is entirely up to you. If you know someone whom you think might enjoy our sort of fiction, spread the word! Tell this person to ask his newsdealer to carry MOH; or to ask the newsdealer for the address of the local wholesaler and to write to the wholesaler saying he wants to buy MOH but the local dealer does not receive it. And, of course, obtaining an extra copy for your friend would not hurt at all.

You have asked me for many things, requested many stories that I want to obtain for you and run in future issues. I fulfilled as many of your requests as it was possible for me to do: I am not satisfied with what it has been possible to do with MOH thus far, though I am not ashamed of our record, either. But there is so much more that could be done . . . IF . . .

Your response in the matter of letters, ballots, criticism, etc., has been wonderful. Now . . . can you do just a little more?
RAWL

The Thing In The House

by H. F. Scotten

If the response from you, the readers, follows the pattern that seems to have been set up thus far, some of you will insist that this is science fiction. We would call it borderline material, not quite science fiction, not quite weird in the "supernatural" sense — very much like the sort of tale that appeared in the old Munsey magazines and in some of the early issues of *AMAZING STORIES* and *ASTOUNDING STORIES OF SUPER-SCIENCE*, to which various readers objected on the grounds that it was not really science-fiction! We do feel, however, that it belongs in *MOH*. About the author, we can tell you nothing except that this is one of two stories he had published back in 1929 and 1930.

"LISTEN!" I caught at the chief's arm. Faintly, but unmistakably, across the field came the terror-laden scream of a man. The chief tensed to listen, then reached over and touched the driver of the big police car on the shoulder. The chauffeur cautiously applied the brakes; we skidded slightly, and stopped.

Peering through the driving rain, we strained our eyes across the snow-covered field at the left of the lonely country road. Presently we discerned a dark figure, running, stumbling through the slush. He scrambled over the rail fence a little ahead of us, and started down the road, his flying, frightened form

plainly illuminated by our glaring headlights. He slipped, fell, then lay inert.

In a moment we were beside him, and lifted him into the car, where he sagged down on the rear seat, breathing heavily. Indistinct words tumbled from his lips; then plainly came: "Chief! — *The Thing! — Murdered!* — Don't let it . . ." The man groaned, and lapsed into unconsciousness.

Chief Mandell, startled at the delirious mention of his own title, hastily wiped the mud and water from the man's face, while I held a flashlight. Surprised recognition forced the exclamation, "*Frankie the Frown!*" Then, to me: "Doctor, this man is a notorious thief. Sounds as though he has information of importance to us. Any chance of his reviving soon?"

I made a hasty examination, and suggested, "We had better get him to my office as quickly as possible, Chief. I am afraid he will need careful attention."

Turning to the chauffeur, the chief said quietly, "All right, Jim," and the car leapt forward toward the city through the pelt-ing rain.

My relations with the police, and particularly the detective department, of which Chief Mandell was the efficient head, back in 192-, had held for me a constantly increasing interest. I practised medicine, when I could not avoid that uninteresting

phase of my activities, but for the past year had been applying my knowledge of psychology, metaphysics, and various other sciences, to the identifying and apprehending of criminals.

My success in this field, which, no doubt, was the direct result of the fascination it held for me, had fostered a lasting friendship between Chief Richard Mandell and me — a friendship which needed not the discomforts of night calls or disagreeable work. We had been returning from an attempt to identify a suspect held in a neighboring city, when the bedraggled and hysterical criminal known to the police as Frankie the Frown entered my experiences. In the car with us, beside the officer driving, was McDonald, as likable and intelligent a reporter as ever wielded a pencil. He was favored above all others by the chief, and few indeed were the investigations in which he did not assist us.

ARRIVING AT MY office, we removed the still unconscious Frankie from the car and laid him on a couch in the warm room. I set to work with stimulants and restoratives, after removing part of his wet clothing. He had been without hat or overcoat, and was chilled through and through.

I was gratified, before long, to see indications of returning consciousness in the man. Present-

ly his eyes opened, stared vacantly at us; then he weakly attempted to arise. I helped him to sit up. His puzzled gaze rested for a moment on Mandell; then recognition dawned in his look. He sprang to his feet, and clutched at the chief's sleeve.

"Chief! You?" he cried. "The Thing! Did you kill it, Chief? Where is it?"

The chief forced him back on the couch. "Take it easy now, Frankie," he said. "That's better. Now tell us all about it."

Full memory, with all its horrors, then returned to him. "For God's sake, Chief, come quick; don't let it get away. It has killed the professor. I didn't do it, Chief, honest I didn't. It was the Thing. The professor made it, and now . . ."

"Wait a minute, Frankie; tell it straight now," the chief broke in. "What professor got killed, and where was it?"

"Professor Huneberg, Chief; and Dr. Rickston is dead, too, but he died from the shock. It was at The Pines, where we lived."

I involuntarily exclaimed aloud at this startling statement. I knew these men.

"WHERE we lived?" the chief exclaimed. "What were you doing there?"

"I worked for them, Chief, ever since I got out of jail."

"What is this Thing, as you call it?"

"Some kind of an animal. The professor made it."

"The professor *made* it?"

"Yes, he created it, but you . . ."

"Where is it now, running around loose?"

"I don't know. If it broke out of the laboratory it is probably still somewhere in the house, if it still exists. Chief, for God's sake, get out there quick! If it gets loose . . ."

Frankie showed signs of becoming hysterical.

"All right, Frankie," the chief said soothingly, "we'll go right out. Doctor, can you fix him up? We will have to take him along. Sounds like a rush order to me."

My office adjoined my living-quarters, so I procured dry shoes, a cap, and an overcoat for Frankie. His socks and coat had been drying on the radiator, and would serve. While Mac and the officer with us helped him into them, I turned to Mandell and said:

"Chief, I knew this Professor Huneberg and Dr. Rickston. They were old acquaintances of mine. Very able scientists, they were, and engaged in biological and chemical research. I had lost track of them since they retired to experiment privately. The professor was noted for his remarkable success in his chosen work. He, I have no doubt, has been experimenting with various animals in the developing and grafting of tissue, and has

probably developed a hybrid with savage tendencies, that got beyond control. I advise you to take ample precautions in attempting to subdue it."

"All right. We'll stop at the station and get a few riot guns. They ought to be precaution enough."

IN A SHORT time, the police car was again roaring through the night. We had stopped and obtained guns for all of us, except Frankie. Two patrolmen had been added to the passenger list, and we presented a formidable appearance.

Frankie told of his relations with the victims of the Thing we were racing to destroy.

"Chief, it was awful," he began, and continued, rather disconnectedly: "The professor didn't mean for us to see it kill him, but the blind rolled up and . . ."

We waited. He covered his face with shaking hands. In a moment he went on:

"The doctor fell. I think his heart failed. I ran to my room in the back part of the house and locked myself in. I've been there since day before yesterday. I was afraid to leave and afraid to stay. I felt like a hunted animal driven into a hole, with something about to come in after me. The picture of the professor being — being killed kept coming before my eyes.

"The Thing was so powerful

I was afraid it would break out of the laboratory and escape from the house. I pictured it roaming around the country — killing, tearing, destroying. Little children, women, strong men; all helpless, and no one to know what did it! God! I tried to force myself to go back into the laboratory to reassure myself that the Thing was gone, as the professor said it would be, but I couldn't."

We let Frankie ramble on, for a while, with his disconnected recital. Handicapped by rain, slush, and slow-moving traffic, it would take us twenty minutes or more to reach The Pines, which was a few miles from the city limits on one of the lesser arterial highways. From it he had fled across more than a mile of dark, rain-lashed country to the point where we found him.

"After a few hours," Frankie continued, "I became calmer. I tried to think, to reason things out. I began to feel foolish to think I had doubted the professor's word. He was a smart man; he must have been right about the Thing. It was surely gone.

"I knew that if I left and ran away, it would only be a question of time until the bodies were discovered. I knew you would find that I had been living in the house. Because of my record, you would think that I had killed the doctor and the

professor, if there was no trace of the Thing. The evidence was all against me. I decided to write to you, Chief, and explain it all, so you could bring men and destroy the monster if it should still be in existence. I didn't want to take a chance on that, even though I was about convinced you would find no trace of it, for there would be no peace, no sanity for me or anyone should it happen to be there. I was going to leave this evening, after dark, and mail the letter to you from some other town. I've got it in my pocket. Here . . .

With shaking fingers, he tried to unfasten the overcoat, but fumbled futilely at the buttons.

"Never mind, Frankie," the chief said; "you can give it to us when we get back."

"Well, anyway, in my letter I told you all about it," Frankie continued, "all about the professor's experiment, and how it killed him; but this evening, after dark, my lamp bulb burned out just as I was finishing. When I was left in the dark I went crazy with fear. I imagined the Thing was about to grab me. Again I was sure it was still in existence. I stuffed the letter in my pocket and ran from the house. I remembered what the professor said about the imagination and I . . ."

"Wait a minute, Frankie," the chief broke in; "you are getting all excited again, and we are

not getting the information we need." And to direct his mind into smoother channels, he said, "Tell us about when you went to work for the professor."

I gave Frankie a drink of brandy. His nerves quieting, he again began to talk, interrupted now and then by the screech of the siren as the car tore through the wet blackness. He told us, briefly, the history of his life. He had been born in the slums. Cuffed and beaten by a drunken mother who was ignorant of the identity of his father, he grew up in an environment that molded his criminal career. Undersized, he was bullied by other boys. He learned to hate and distrust everyone. He played a lone hand always. God knows how he survived a childhood so bitter that his face had never relaxed in a smile. He earned thus the only name he had ever known, "Frankie the Frown".

During the war, into which the draft had forcibly plunged him, his bitter sufferings and privations had produced the only longing for human sympathy and comradeship he had ever known; but his ferret face and hate-flashing eyes had turned away any who might otherwise have "buddied" with him.

After the war, thievery and prison again. Then his release. On his way back to the miserable alleys and hovels he had known as home, walking the

lonely miles that he might hoard against hunger the transportation money given him at the prison, he had stopped at the place that had become for him the only real home he had ever enjoyed. He stopped to beg food and found . . .

"He called me 'son', Chief," he said. "Me, with my face, Dr. Rickston called 'son'! He took me in, and he and Professor Huneberg fed me. Something seemed to break inside me. I cried. I told them everything about myself, but they gave me a job. Professor said my type interested him — he wanted to study my mental 'reactions'. Their housekeeper had left, so I took her place. I could cook, and keep the house clean. They began to teach me things. I studied hard, and learned fast. I was happy."

Frankie had now grown quite calm. He went on quietly with his story, looking out into the blackness now and then to discern landmarks and judge our nearness to our destination.

"Professor Huneberg was a wonderful man. I guess I was foolish to think the Thing was still alive. He said the electrons would fly apart when he died; that the monster would cease to exist."

"Cease to exist?"

"Yes. He made it, you know, and he let it kill him so it couldn't hurt anyone else. You see you can't . . ."

"All right, Frankie," the chief interrupted again, thinking he was once more becoming hysterical; "we'll soon find out for ourselves, and then we'll kill this 'Thing,' and everything will be all right. Just keep calm, now, until we get there."

What did these seemingly hysterical words of Frankie's mean? I began to wonder if there was something more sinister behind them than we first supposed. I could not but believe that he told the truth about the deaths of the doctor and professor. But if some kind of animal killed them, what did he mean by its "ceasing to exist"? By its electrons "flying apart"?

"Well, anyway," Frankie continued, "I've written it all down in my letter. You can read it, or I can tell you about it when we get back to town. But the professor must have been right. He was too smart a man not to know what he was talking about. We probably won't find a thing."

Frankie again peered through the rain-streaked windshield. Out here in the country the slushy snow was whiter, and the flying landscape became recognizable to him.

"There's the place," he exclaimed suddenly, pointing, "back off the road in that grove of pines. They gave it its name on account of those trees. Turn in at that stone pillar. That's the driveway."

THE OFFICER driving skillfully skidded the car into the narrow lane leading back to the house. The rapidly melting snow was unbroken by the tracks of any vehicle, but the headlights of the car illuminated plainly the footprints of Frankie, left in his terror-stricken flight from the place.

It looked foreboding. Squatting among its guardian pines, the ancient dwelling resembled some gargantuan monster of the dark. No light showed, but as we pulled up before the front entrance, we heard the cries of various animals coming from the rear.

"Those are the professor's animals," Frankie volunteered, "the ones he used in his experiments. Poor things! I didn't dare leave my room even to feed them. They are cold and starving."

"I haven't got a key to the front door, Chief," he said as we got out of the car. "I'll go to the back, and come through and open it. No use you wading through the snow."

His fear, by this time, seemed entirely gone. In a matter-of-fact way he prepared to admit us to the house.

"Wait a minute, not so fast," the chief said, as Frankie started around the house. "Jim — to one of the officers — you go with him. McGruder and Flynn will station themselves on each side of the house. Shoot any-

thing you see running from it, *and don't miss!*"

"It's all right, Chief. If it's still there, it is shut up in the laboratory," Frankie said.

"We're taking no chances. Go ahead."

Frankie and the officer whom the chief had called Jim disappeared around the side of the house. The other two withdrew a short distance where they could watch all sides, while the chief, Mac, and I waited at the front door to be admitted.

We heard a door open and close in the rear. The animals in the professor's zoo set up a great whining and crying as they heard and scented human beings moving around them.

Presently we heard footsteps and voices in the room on the other side of the door we faced. Through the cracks in the drawn blinds we saw the lights flash on. We heard Frankie's voice moan, "God! There's Dr. Rickston, just 'as I put him in that chair. Oh — Doctor!" Then we heard him scream: "Look! The glass in the laboratory door is broken! The Thing! It's broken out! It's alive! It's in here some . . ."

A scream! Frankie's scream! Then a horrible mingling of animal sounds. Roars, snarls, snapping of jaws mingled with agonized human cries in a bedlam of blood-chilling noise. Thumps, thuds; like the floor being flailed by a human body!

Sharp cracks, as of breaking bones. The hoarse voice of Jim mouthing incoherent words in abject terror. Then the repeated roars from his gun, as he instinctively and blindly pulled the trigger.

The chief was battering on the door with feet and fists. "Open up!" he shouted; "open the door, Jim!"

No answer.

The sounds within died away. The last we distinguished was a low moan, then silence.

THE COMBINED strength of the three of us in one battering rush tore off the lock, and the door swung open, revealing to our startled eyes a sight I hope never to see again. The chief called out to Flynn and McGruder: "Stay where you are, men," and turned to survey the scene.

Jim had almost reached the door in his attempt to escape. He lay against the wall in a dead faint, but otherwise unharmed. The Thing was not in sight. Sprawled in a chair in a corner was the body of a man I instantly recognized as Dr. Rickston, while in the shadow of a huge library table, over which blazed an electric fixture, lay all that remained of Frankie the Frown. Horribly mangled, broken and bleeding, he scarcely resembled a human being. His clothing was torn to ribbons, and clutched in his hand

were a few scraps of bloody paper.

The chief gently extracted these from the clenched fingers, whispering as he did so: "Part of his letter! Where's the rest of it?"

He glanced around the room, but the pages were nowhere to be seen. The chief thrust the fragments of the letter in his pocket; there was no time to look for the rest now. An unknown danger surrounded us.

Mac and I stood guard with riot guns, half expecting some inconceivable and horrible monstrosity to leap on us from some place of concealment. Tensely we listened for sounds indicating its presence. All was quiet except for the cries from small animals somewhere in the rear. Our eyes roved nervously about the room, noting the arrangement of doors and furniture. The length of the long library ran crosswise of the house. At its right end was the fatal door, the shattered glass bearing mute evidence of the Thing's escape into the library. In the wall facing us was a door leading to the rear, evidently the one through which Frankie and Jim had entered the room. It was closed. At the left end was a huge fireplace with its dead ashes, occupying most of the wall space. Near the hearth a flight of steps with open balustrade rose, paused at a landing, and turning, continued

upward to the right until they disappeared above the ceiling level. An unlighted wall bracket hung over the landing to light the stairs. To our left, heavily curtained windows broke the front wall of the house beside the door we had entered. In spite of the more shocking objects, my eyes rested on and noted such incongruous things, as an emergency gasoline student's lamp resting on the mantel, pictures on the wall, and books and magazines on the table. Where was the beast? The darkened laboratory at our right, with its broken glass door, held terrifying possibilities.

The chief moved cautiously toward the laboratory door, lips compressed in deadly determination. We flanked his movements with ready weapons. It was evident that the laboratory and upstairs rooms furnished the only possible hiding-place of the beast.

Trembling with excitement, we neared the broken door. The chief threw a ray from his flashlight through the jagged opening. Nothing was seen of the beast as he swept it about the room. He reached through and released the lock, cautiously swung open the door, and finding a switch beside it, pressed it and flooded the room with light. We entered and found ourselves in a marvelously well-equipped laboratory.

A barred window, with rain-streaked panes, was opposite the door we had entered. Another door, open, at the left, or back end of the room, revealed an iron grating through which came the distressed cries of various animals. I gasped with dismay at the litter of broken instruments, test-tubes, and scientific equipment scattered about.

LOOKING around, we found the body of Professor Hunsberg crumpled on the floor, between the large work-table and the window. "All dead!" the chief muttered, after his quick glance disproved the possibility of the beast's presence in the laboratory.

The professor's cold form had also been brutally torn and broken, but like the doctor, he had ceased breathing at least thirty-six hours before. Saddened beyond measure, I almost forgot the necessity of quickly finding and destroying the cause of this carnage. I was visualizing that magnificent physique as it had been in life. His six feet of powerful frame had borne a proud head with its dark beard and hair, and eyes that flashed with almost unearthly intelligence from the wonderful brain behind them. In appearance, he was the very opposite of the doctor, who, with his mild blue eyes, white hair and beard, and frail form,

presented a sharp contrast to his companion.

The chief, after his hurried examination, abruptly left the room, and was followed by Mac. I took one more hasty look about, and followed them, snapping off the light and partially closing the door.

The chief was again examining Frankie's body. He arose and silently pointed to a narrow streak of bloodstain that ran in a line toward the stairs. He moved toward them, Mac and I following, but I confess with less bravado than his stalwart form presented. At the foot of the step he paused, and spoke gravely, "Men, we don't know what kind of beast this is we are about to face. There is not the slightest doubt that it is lurking upstairs, probably in the hall. From the appearance of its victims, it kills differently, more brutally, than anything I ever saw before. You must be right, Doctor; it surely is a hybrid of the professor's developing. What horrible shape he gave it we can only conjecture — until we see it.

"I will go upstairs — there is not room in the hall for three of us to fight it — and if my shots don't stop it, I will retreat. You and Mac stand where you can shoot through the balustrade. If it gets past us we still have Flynn and McGruder outside."

We started to protest, but he

waved us to silence, and finding a switch that lighted the wall bracket at the landing, began to mount the stairs, gun ready for instant action. He turned at the landing and continued upward, his head and shoulders disappearing above the ceiling level, but his feet and legs still visible through the balustrade as, step by step, he approached the top. Now they too, were gone, and we heard his soft footfalls in the hall above. Then silence.

We held our breaths. We listened apprehensively for the expected burst of shots that would tell of his meeting with the monster.

THE SOUND OF his footsteps resumed. Our eyes were glued to that last visible point of steps where their angle met the ceiling line. In a moment a foot appeared there, feeling cautiously for the next step down. He was coming down, backward, without firing a shot!

Slowly, uncertainly, the other foot appeared, and felt behind its mate for a lower step. What did the chief see? Why didn't he shoot?

Slowly, hesitatingly, grudgingly, he backed down to the landing, and then his body came into view, arm rigidly holding the gun-butt against his shoulder, pointing the weapon upstairs. He held his flashlight in the other hand. A look

of puzzled amazement shone from his distended eyes. For a moment he paused at the landing, and then continued, still backward, down to where we stood. Trembling slightly, though I was sure not from fear, he stood still, holding gun and eyes on the landing.

"For God's sake, Chief, what is it?" Mac whispered.

He did not answer. I was watching that last visible step, momentarily expecting to see a hairy paw come into view as the beast descended. My hands gripped my weapon like steel vises. In silence we waited — waited.

Suddenly, above the landing, appeared something floating, swaying, in midair. The light from the bracket fell full upon it, a mass of something white and black with red splotches. It was a scrap of cloth and a handful of torn bloody papers, *apparently held in the talons of some monstrous, inconceivable, invisible horror!*

"There's your animal!" the chief gritted through clenched teeth.

"Damn!" Mac whispered. "You can't see it!"

We stood paralyzed with astonishment. Incredulity, amazement, horror must have mingled on our countenances, as we waited.

A low growling, a snapping of invisible jaws smote our ears. A stench, putrid, nauseating,

spread and filled the room until my stomach retched. Then: "Look," Mac whispered. The light bracket was bending slowly downward — bending, as though the metal tubing was melting, and too soft to hold up the socket and shade. It bent and twisted until the wires were short-circuited, a fuse blew out, and the room was plunged into inky blackness.

"Light that lamp!" the chief shouted, and sought to throw the beam of his flashlight on the stairs. Only a moment it burned, and then failed. Again the darkness, broken this time by jets of flame as the chief fired blindly at the thing on the landing. He hurled the useless flashlight after the streams of lead. It thudded against the wall and fell to the landing. With its characteristic stubbornness it again lit up, and threw a spot of light against the baseboard. In the reflected light we saw the mass of bloody papers and bit of cloth describing grotesque gyrations in the air above the steps.

THE THING was making the air hideous with its screams and awful stench. We backed hastily away to the center of the room. Intermittent flares from Mac's matches, as he struggled with the refractory lamp, only made the almost total darkness more sinister, more fraught with the terror of a possible over-

whelming rush from the invisible monster.

After what seemed hours, Mac succeeded in coaxing a flame from the mantle of the lamp, and as he placed it on the table, we saw the bloody scraps of cloth and paper float-swiftly and jerkily toward us. We backed to the open front door, and halted there.

THE chief coolly and methodically emptied his gun at the screams and snarls coming from the thin air before us. Mac did the same. Then the roar of my gun drowned the unearthly cries. Plaster and pictures fell from the wall opposite, but the cloth and papers still hovered above the table! Why the Thing did not overwhelm us in one savage rush I do not know.

We hastily reloaded our guns in the face of Mac's sudden exclamation, "My God! You can't kill it!"

Jim had by this time revived from his faint, and with a look of unutterable horror in his eyes, he dashed headlong from the house, and was taken in charge by Flynn. McGruder came up on the porch, and staring through the door, watched the unusual battle with unbelieving eyes, too much astonished to take part.

Again we directed a roaring but hopeless fusillade at that unseen presence. Amid a bedlam of sound, the roar of our

guns commingling with screams and shrieks from our maddened, invisible target, the lamp was suddenly raised from the table, suspended a second in mid-air, and sent by an unseen force hurtling, crashing into the wall at our left. There it exploded.

Burning splashes of gasoline scattered all over the room, igniting everything they touched. Frantically, we slapped at our burning clothing, sustaining, luckily, but few burns. The room was in flames. We removed our coats, and beat at the fire, but it was a hopeless task to subdue it.

THROUGH THE smoke, I saw the floating scraps of cloth and paper move swiftly toward the laboratory door. The door swung open, the bloody mass disappeared into the darkened room, and the door slammed shut. I heard the crash of glass in the laboratory. The Thing was trapped in there. Possibly the fire would accomplish what we had failed to do.

Driven to the open, we were helpless to drag out the corpses, helpless to do anything but watch, as the old mansion became a roaring furnace, and its surrounding guardian pines flaming torches.

Flames soon burst out from the barred laboratory window, and as a last high-pitched scream from within died away, we were sure, and were devout-

ly thankful, that the Thing was not invulnerable. The fire had destroyed it.

Mac turned to Mandell. "Chief," he said, "Frankie's letter is gone. Now we'll never know what the Thing . . ."

"But," interrupted Mandell, "you owe your life to the fact that the Thing happened to retain the letter in its claws when it tore Frankie to pieces. I shudder to think of our fate had its presence not been made known to us by those bloody papers."

A few hours later, a trio of mystified men — the chief, Mac and I — were deciphering the few and half-effaced words on the scraps of Frankie's letter which the chief had salvaged from his fingers. Just enough of them were legible to whet still more our curiosity regarding the origin of the Thing. They were few, indeed, but they carried a hint of some terrible experiment. We dared not make public the true facts of the night's experiences.

THE NEXT morning, Mac and I visited the scene of the fire with the coroner. The little that was left of the victims sickened me. Mac was poking about among the ruins with a stick. I saw him stoop, turn over a charred board, pick something from among the debris and thrust it hastily in his pocket. He came quickly to where I stood, well out of ear-

shot of the coroner and his helpers.

"I've got 'em!" he whispered excitedly; "the pages of Frankie's letter. The Thing must have broken the window and dropped them outside before the fire got to them. A falling board flattened them into the snow, and they were saved."

WE hastened back to town, and hurried to the chief's office to tell him the news, and read, together, the explanation of the Thing's existence. Again we were bitterly disappointed. It was impossible to read the story on those blood-stained, water-soaked and torn sheets of paper. Only a comparatively few words were legible.

Mac was downcast. "What a story! What a whale of a story!" he grieved. "If only . . ."

"Yes," the chief answered, "but you wouldn't dare print it."

"I guess you are right, Chief, but I could read it."

"You may yet have that privilege," I said, gathering up the pages, and accepting from the chief the other scraps he had put in his desk. "I will see what the judicious use of a few acids will do toward making these readable."

For days I worked. It was a tedious, laborious task, but I succeeded. Mac called each day, and pleaded to be permitted to read the pages as I restored them, but I forced him

to wait until the whole was finished.

At last it was done, and I held the patched and stained, but legible pages in my hand.

That evening I had guests — just two: Mac and Chief Mandell. Well, they knew why they had been invited. Both illy concealed their curiosity regarding the story I was to read them. I could not resist the temptation to heighten the drama by keeping them in suspense. Leisurely I reached into a desk drawer, and then held up to their gaze those gruesome pages.

Each, for a moment, held the sheaf of papers in a trembling hand. I knew that they were visualizing them as they had first seen them, floating, jerking in midair, clutched in the claw of that mysterious entity whose secret the blurred words were now about to reveal.

I TOOK THE pages, settled myself in a chair, and prepared to read. The chief stood on the hearth, back to the fire, nervously teetering on heels and toes. Mac restlessly paced a short journey between table and bookcase, back and forth.

The letter began: "Chief Mandell:

"For God's sake, heed these words! I am hiding in the room of a house in which lie the bodies of Professor Alexis Huneberg and Dr. Artemus J. Rickston. In the laboratory, with

the body of the professor, there lurks, I am afraid, the horrible monster of his creation that killed him. If it still exists, and should escape, God pity the world! Through the highways and byways would it stalk, tearing limb from limb all whom it should meet, and none to know what it was; for, Chief, this monster is invisible!

"I am almost crazed with fear, but I must write this, and you must believe it, for the safety of thousands may depend on your accepting what I tell you as the truth. Also, there will be no rest for me, no sanity, until I know if this Thing is still alive, or non-existent. I have tried a dozen times to force myself to go back into that awful room to find out, but I am afraid. My legs fail me, my nerves collapse. Then, too, when the bodies are found, and my presence here becomes known, I would be hunted, always, as a murderer, if the monster does not now exist. My black record would be sufficient to convict me; for you know me, Chief — I am Frankie the Frown.

"I can't stay here much longer. I have no food, and no water. Terror lurks in the rest of the house; I dare not leave this room. But tonight I'll run from the house, and mail this letter to you from another town.

"You must believe this, Chief, and bring men to destroy this

awful monster. I don't know how you will do it, but I'll tell all I know about it, and maybe you can consult some scientist, and find a way.

"I'll tell you how I came to be here, Chief, and then you will know I did not kill the doctor and professor, the only friends I ever had.

"I came here when I got out of jail, a little over a year ago."

Here followed a more detailed account of Frankie's meeting with his benefactors, an enlargement of the story he had told us in the speeding police car; of how they had befriended him; of his regeneration. He told of his studies under the tutelage of Dr. Rickston; of how he assisted Professor Huneberg in his experiments; of how he grew to almost worship these two men, the first humans to show him any love.

I TAKE UP the thread of his story further along in its pages:

"I had been here about nine months when I noticed a subtle change in the professor.

"I had by this time laid the foundation for a good education. My starved mind seemed to soak up knowledge as a sponge does water. I became intensely interested in my employers' work, having grasped, by this time, some understanding of their various experiments. The professor's work, especially,

fascinated me. He practiced what he called painless vivisection on animal after animal. The brain was his especial study. Time after time I had seen him remove parts of the skull from different species of monkey, carefully parting the convolutions of the brain-matter, holding life in the body until the last possible moment, only to shake his head in disappointment, and plunge again into study. One day I asked him what he was searching for, and he said, 'The secret of life, my boy.' I was not surprised, and such was my confidence in him that I did not doubt he would find it. He did.

"But a change came over him. He became silent, moody. His eyes continually carried a far-away look, into which at times came a glance of fear. This became more marked, as the days went by. He lost weight, ate little, seemed to be losing health rapidly. The doctor was deeply engrossed in some important work of his own, and did not notice it. I began to worry.

"It was one night in the fall when the thing happened that made me doubt his sanity — and mine, too, for that matter.

"We had retired early; the doctor and professor in their bedrooms upstairs, and I in my room here on the ground floor. I could not sleep, and after two hours or so of tossing about, arose and wandered into the

living-room, thinking to read awhile. Before I could turn on the light, I heard a voice in the laboratory. It was the professor's. I stepped softly to the open door, wondering whom he could be talking to. There were no lights in there either, but the moon shone brightly through the barred window, and I could see everything plainly. The professor was standing by the work-table, one hand resting on its glass top and the other pointing a long finger at the iron grating which covered the open door into the zoo. I held my breath. He seemed to be talking to the animals — in his sleep. But no; his eyes were bright, intelligence shone from them. What were these strange words he was saying? . . .

"Ah, you are there. I can not see you, but I know you exist, beast of beasts. In my mind's eye, I see your form taking shape. Would that I could see you in reality, monster. But no; on second thought, perhaps the sight of your form in the flesh would be too awful for mere human to behold and remain sane. Now your presence manifests itself. The monkeys are cowering in paralyzed and silent terror in their cages; your stench chokes my nostrils; your jaws snap; your claws rake the floor as you throw your invisible bulk against the bars . . ."

"Chief, I stood frozen to the spot. I swear that as he spoke

I breathed in a reeking stink, like one that comes from a long-dead body taken from the sea. I heard a snapping of jaws and a furious scratching on the floor beyond the iron grating. Something shook and rattled the barred door. The passage on the other side of it was plainly illuminated by the moonbeams, but *nothing was there; something invisible was shaking those bars!* The professor's voice went on:

"Ah, what a triumph for the mind of man. Created — actually created from the emanations from the chemical of life! You are powerful, but the mind of man is more powerful still, for I control your existence and keep you behind those bars. But I am puzzled to know what use to make of you. . . . I admit it — I am afraid of you. I feel a slight weakness in concentrating on the thought that you are *behind* those bars. I played with the thought of materializing you here in the laboratory. And the fact that I incorporated the Horla in your makeup I regret, for the Horla was a nemesis — de Maupassant could not overcome it and finally tried to commit suicide. Ah, I wonder if I shall have to . . . but not yet, beast of beasts. I must decide first whether it be safe to give you to the world of science, and . . ."

"That is all I heard — that night. Finding strength to move,

I fled in silent terror to my room.

"The next morning, I approached the zoo at feeding time reluctantly, but everything seemed to be in order. The monkeys and other animals seemed to have forgotten their terror of the night, but on this side of the iron grating, plainly imprinted in the sawdust on the floor, were strange grotesque footprints! With a shuddering foot, I obliterated them.

"Fearing to cause him unnecessary worry, I said nothing of the night's experience to the doctor. The professor looked haggard, but a strange light gleamed in his eyes.

"For several nights after that, he crept down to the laboratory; there to hold practically the same conversation with the Thing, which seemed to come into being at his will. Each night I followed him, and listened until my trembling nerves forced me to flee to my room. How he produced the phenomenon I did not then learn, and I dared not ask him.

"After three or four nights of eavesdropping came the gruesome end of these nightly visits.

"I HAD FOLLOWED the professor's clandestine footsteps as usual, but when I softly crept to the laboratory door, he was not in sight. A noise in the zoo drew my eyes to the grating. It was open. Presently he came in-to view leading Chika, the large-

est of his collection of monkeys. He then fastened the poor beast to the grating with a short chain. Stepping into the laboratory, he closed and locked the grating, and stood for a moment gazing through the bars at the trembling monkey. The professor moved to the work-table, turned, and again faced the grating. Chika, on the zoo side of the bars, clung to them, whimpering, and peered piteously between them at his master. Instinct must have warned him of a terrible fate.

"The professor began to speak; to summon, from God knows where, that awful, foul-smelling, invisible horror. In a moment my startled eyes saw the monkey rise quickly into midair, where he hung, suspended, twisting and squirming. Again terror possessed me, and I fled, the beast's smothered shrieks in my ears.

"The next morning, my worst fears were justified: Chika was gone. The professor muttered something about the monkey taking sick in the night; fearing contagion, he said, he had taken him out and buried him. But in the sawdust on the floor before the grating I found a hairy foot, with dangling bloody tendons! I almost cried aloud in horror at this discovery. I decided that I would face the professor with my knowledge of it, and beg and plead with him to stop his nightly creation of the monster. I would follow the

professor to the laboratory, and present myself before he had time to demonstrate his power.

"After retiring, I lay listening for his soft footfalls, as he would pass through the hall above my head. I did not hear them. Long after the usual time for his nightly visit to the laboratory, I listened. He did not go. Sleep finally claimed me.

"Abruptly I was thrust back into consciousness by a shrill scream. It was repeated. I leaped from bed and dashed upstairs. The doctor's voice drew me into the professor's room, where he was soothing and quieting the terror-stricken man. 'Nightmare,' the doctor said, and after a few moments' conversation, we again retired.

"THIS was the beginning of a series of nightly disturbances of like nature, in which it became more and more difficult to rouse the professor from these awful experiences. They did not seem like nightmares to me, but rather the screams of terror from a man who, wide-awake but helpless, sees some nocturnal, but real, horror about to overwhelm him.

"The professor's clandestine visits to the laboratory ceased, but each night we were awakened by his screams. Day by day he declined in health. The doctor, alarmed at his condition, vainly attempted to diagnose his ailment, but could learn

nothing, increasingly mystified by the recurrent nightmares.

"At last came the incident that preceded the tragedy. Day before yesterday, it was. It seems weeks.

"The professor, looking wan and haggard, was in the laboratory. The doctor sat at one end of the library table, examining various medical works, his mind on the professor's ailment. At the other end of the table I sat studying. I glanced through the open door into the laboratory, where the professor was peering through the microscope at a bit of chemical on a slide. Something in his attitude caught, and held, my attention. He raised his head as if to rest his eyes. I saw him wearily pass his hand across them, then look absently into the zoo. Suddenly he stiffened, his eyes bulged in horror as though beholding some awful menace. He suddenly flung out his hands before him in a gesture of defense, and then — screamed! We ran in, caught his flailing arms, and, with difficulty, finally quieted him. We led him into the library, and laid him on the couch. The doctor administered a sedative, and he rested quietly for a half-hour.

"WE were astonished at this coming on him in the daytime. Now we knew it was no ordinary nightmare. We feared the worst: he was going insane. While we were discussing, in

whispers, his trouble, the professor sat up and spoke:

"This is the end, my dear friends. I can resist it no longer. Tomorrow I shall tell you all. I shall reveal to you the most astonishing discovery the world of science has ever known, and then take my departure into that spiritual world where the soul is at peace, undisturbed by the turbulent emotions and ambitions of this mortal mind. And now, Doctor, if you will give me a sleeping draft, and stay by me through the evening and night, I believe I can rest, and disturb you no more."

"THE PROFESSOR rested well that night, and the next morning he was more cheerful, although quiet. He spent most of the day in going over his private affairs, placing certain legal papers in a large envelope which he handed to the doctor, saying, 'You may open them after I am gone, and dispose of my possessions not mentioned therein as you see fit, Doctor. As you know, I have no relatives.'

"We were stunned by his calm preparations for death; we couldn't believe it. Aimlessly the doctor and I dragged out the day.

"Late in the afternoon, the professor called us around the big library table, and after we were seated, spent a few moments in silent meditation. Then

he began his amazing explanation. I'll try to write it in his own words as accurately as possible, Chief, for you may have to call in some scientist to find a way to destroy the monster, if the professor was wrong and it still exists.

"I had hoped,' the professor began, 'to overcome the weakness that drew my mind into dangerous channels, but I find it impossible. Voluntarily I shall become a martyr to science, and by so doing remove from you a very real danger, that — God forgive me! — I myself created.

"Doctor, I am confident that I have discovered the true secret of life itself, and that Frankie here may understand it. I will word my explanation in the simplest form possible.

"Science has determined that all substance is made up of cohering atoms, which in turn are, individually, miniature solar systems, with their planetlike electrons revolving around a sun-like nucleus. Science has also practically decided that these cohering atoms vibrate at various rates. Therefore we must conclude that all living creatures, composed of various substances with their vibrating atoms, depend upon vibrations for life. Life is vibration.

"Now, we naturally demand to know what sets up and maintains that vibration. Ah, when we find the answer to that question, we will have delved as

deeply as it is possible to go into the secret of life. I am sure that I have found that answer!"

"The professor paused for a moment, and then went on:

"Imagine a machine, an intricate, marvelously constructed machine; for example, the human body. It is the most wonderful we know of. To live, to move, its atoms must constantly vibrate. Whence comes, and what is, the force that energizes them? My theory, which I have proved to my own satisfaction, is this:

"Deep within the machine, in a hidden compartment possibly in the brain, lies a bit of radioactive mineral. So delicate is it, that if we were to break open the machine to find it, it would, upon being exposed, immediately disintegrate. Now let us see how it produces life.

"The bit of mineral, at its normal rate of disintegration, bombards the atoms of the machine with constant streams of flying particles, or electrons, analogous to the comets we see flashing through our solar system. We have a comparison in the similar action of a bit of radium. However, unlike radium, our life-giving mineral can never be isolated and analyzed.

"Under the ceaseless hammering of the streams of electrons from the mineral, the atoms in the human machine vibrate, the machine moves, and there we have life! Finally the

bit of mineral is exhausted. No longer are the atoms bombarded with its flying particles; they cease to vibrate; the machine stops, rusts away, disintegrates; and there we have death!

"But what becomes of the electrons thrown off from the bit of life-giving mineral? Ah, again like those mysterious wanderers, the comets, they journey on an inconceivable orbit. But eventually, as if willed or directed by some supreme Intelligence, they come together, collide, are fused into a new mass in an embryo, and again take up the work of producing the life-giving vibrations in a new human machine. Do you not see how this all fits in with the half-believed theory that our own solar system is but an atom in some vast cosmic body?

"Human intelligence — the mind, the soul, or whatever name we give it — seems to be a force within, yet not an integral part of the machine. My theory is that it is an induction, a sort of magnetic field, produced by the whirring flight of the flying particles of mineral. We know that an induced or secondary current of electricity, if properly collected and brought to bear on the primary or producing current, can materially disturb its progress. Now, the mind, or thought, can have a similar effect on the flying electrons from the bit of radioactive mineral. In fact, intense

concentration can control, to a certain extent, their orbit, or arrest, temporarily, their flight through space. Telepathy, the power of mind over matter, faith-healing, and other more or less proven powers of the mind illustrate this. Perhaps this proves the Biblical assertion that man is made in the likeness of God, whose supreme. Intelligence directs and controls the electronlike comets of a great cosmic body. Though it grieves me to be compelled to shock you with the tragedy of it, I am about to give you a practical demonstration of my theory.

"AS A CHILD, I was endowed with an unusual imagination. Growing to manhood, this characteristic developed into an ability to concentrate thought to the nth degree. When I formed my theory of life, I set about to prove it. Not being able to find the mysterious mineral in the bodies of animals by vivisection, I went on to the next step in the experiment, which was to attempt to arrest and control, and form into some active organization, the flying electrons through intense concentration.

"I had always been interested in tales of the bizarre, the mysterious. My imagination would run rampant in picturing their grotesque subjects. From them I conceived the idea of creating a creature whose

main characteristic would be — invisibility! I selected Bierce's sharp-fanged and colorless enigma, *The Damned Thing*; F. Marion Crawford's slimy, powerful, and noisome horror in *The Upper Berth*; and the intangible, persistent *Horla* of de Maupassant. I imagined a combination of this horrific trio; I concentrated on that mental picture; the flight of emanating particles of mineral from the lode in my brain was arrested; they formed into a gaseous, invisible mass; and — it came into being!

"I protected myself by visualizing the horror beyond the barred door in the passage to the zoo. I saw the sawdust on the floor fly from under the scratching claws of *The Damned Thing*! I smelt the nauseating stench from the creature of *The Upper Berth* as it shook the iron bars of the grating! I felt the terrifying unseen presence of *The Horla*! God! It was uncanny; and although I was elated at the proving of my theory, I was much afraid, and came quickly from the laboratory. My mind drawn away from concentration, the particles or electrons were released from its restraining power; they resumed their flight, and the invisible creature ceased to be!

"But I was fascinated by the experiment; my mind ran wild, and nightly I repeated, with growing perfection, the

creation of that unseen horror. Finally, to test its power, I took the monkey Chika from his cage, tied him to the bars of the grating, went into the laboratory, and watching, concentrating, saw, through the bars, poor Chika literally torn to pieces by the unnamable terror I had brought into being!

"The professor paused, and mopped, with shaking hand, a damp brow.

"THAT was enough. I quit my terrible experimenting — too late! Then came the nightmares. But you were wrong in calling them that. They were the result of my inability to keep my mind from the Thing. I would, without volition, begin its creation in my bedroom. Terrorized, I would cry out; you would come to me, and my mind would be drawn away from it. After yesterday's experience in the laboratory, I fully realized the danger. It was inevitable that the Thing would get beyond my control. You, Doctor, and Frankie, were in constantly increasing danger. And so this is the end. I shall go into the laboratory, bring this Thing into being for the last time, and allow it to destroy this human machine of mine. After which, of course, the electrons forming it will be released from the control of my mind, resume their flight, and the danger will be forever removed. That is all."

"THE DOCTOR AND I, when he had finished, sat amazed, as though turned to stone. I believed the story, because of the things I had seen, but the doctor, finally speaking, suspected a flaw in the professor's reasoning. With trembling voice, he spoke:

"But, Professor, are you quite sure the emanations from the mineral will be released after death? May not the electrons continue to form the Thing, and it remain in existence, for ever presenting an invincible menace to all mankind?"

"Yes, Doctor, I am quite sure," he answered. "You have seen that I have brought it into existence several times, yet it does not now exist. That proves your fears are groundless."

"I know that it does not now exist, Professor, but may it not have ceased to be at the end of each materialization because you willed it so? If the mind could bring it into being, it may be necessary for it also to will it out of existence. Thus, if you die with this horror extant, its form may remain indefinitely as you created it, because of the lack of further control from your mind. This could easily be possible, as witness the electrons revolving around the nucleus in an atom, or the comets racing on definite orbits through myriad universes; once set on a course, they continue to follow it."

"No, Doctor, I am sure I am

right. The time grows short, or I might be able to refute your theory by reasoning. Instead, I will prove its fallacy by demonstration. I am afraid my mind will not remain much longer in control. To avoid danger, I must go; I must say good-bye.

'Nol Nol' we cried, springing up in grief-stricken protest.

'Doctor, we have been lifelong friends. Your companionship has meant more to me than I can express in words. Together we have worked to increase knowledge, and our labors have been not all in vain. But to you shall be given the honor of announcing my discovery to the world of science. It is well; I would not have it otherwise. To me the discovery justifies the end. *Sic itur ad astra* — thus one goes to the stars; such is the way to immortality.'

'Turning to me he said: 'My boy, your life here with us has given the lie to those who would say, "Ye can not be born again," and if I had any part in your regeneration, I have been amply repaid by your devotion to us, and your unselfish ministrations to me in my affliction. I charge you with the duty of remaining with the doctor, and comforting him in his declining years, which can not be so very numerous.'

'Then his voice grew stern as he spoke further: 'Do not, under any circumstances, come in to the laboratory until it is all

over; until silence within betokens all danger past. Again, my dear friends, farewell!'

'He gripped our hands firmly, and stepped quickly into the laboratory. Closing the door, he drew the blind over its glass panel. For a moment we were paralyzed with fear of what was about to happen; then with a common impulse we sprang to the door, where some unseen power seemed to hold us back. Of course we could do nothing, even had we had the power to think coherently.

'Within, all was quiet for a few moments. Presently I detected that terribly nauseating odor creeping from the crack under the door. Then came a hoarse cry and a dull thud, as though the professor had fallen. The jar released the catch on the blind, and it snapped up, revealing to our startled eyes a sight that I hope no man ever sees again.

'The professor was supine on the floor, writhing and twisting into horribly grotesque attitudes. His eyes, filled with indescribable terror, were seemingly gazing into a face just above his, but we could see no other presence in the room. His mouth was opening slowly, forced by an invisible pry. The cords stood out from his neck, as the muscles involuntarily resisted the action. Slowly the lower jaw came down. Wider opened his mouth, until the bones parted with a

sickening crack, and the chin lay loosely on the throat.

"We gasped in horror, rooted to the spot. The doctor moaned in sickened pity. A terrible fascination seemed to hold our eyes on the frightful scene.

"Mingled with the inarticulate cries and moans from the professor, we heard a continuous snarling and snapping from unseen jaws. Great blood-spurting gashes appeared all over his body, as clothing and flesh were ripped to ribbons. His legs and arms were moving about, assuming tortuous positions, the bones crunching and snapping between invisible fangs. Mauled and torn, gashed and broken, the poor tortured body was suddenly flung upward, suspended in midair then began to bend and double, backward, head and shoulders meeting the hips as the spine broke with a sickening report. The bleeding and shapeless corpse of the professor fell to the floor, and the sacrifice was ended.

"The doctor released his deathlike grip on my arm, and staggered backward. Before I could catch him, he fainted, and fell heavily, his head striking the library table. I lifted him and placed him in a chair, but death was already glazing his eyes. As I saw that, all reason left my benumbed brain, and I fled, screaming, to my room, where I am now hiding and writing this.

"But, Chief, maybe the doctor was right. Maybe that Thing is still in there, alive. If it is, God help . . ."

THUS, ABRUPTLY, the letter ended. At this point Frankie's light had burned out, and left him in the dark; terror had overwhelmed him, and snatching up the pages, he fled.

As I finished reading the explanation of the horror that had so nearly overcome us, I raised my eyes and looked at Mac and Chief Mandell. Finally Mac blew out his breath and shook his head.

"I believe it," he said, "and so do you. But nobody else would. We'll have to cook up some story that sounds plausible to account for what happened there at The Pines. . . . And for the first time, I can understand why suppressing the facts of a case might really be in the public interest."

"At least for the time being," I said.

"For a long time," Chief Mandell amended.

We shook hands all around, and I put the papers away, where they have rested until now. The precise explanation of how the professor created the Thing was not among these sheets, nor was anything left of the house. I wonder still if I would have destroyed the explanation if it had been available to me. I wonder, even more,

if I would have tried to make use of it.

That I never had to face this

temptation is something for which I will always be grateful.

Books

THE DARK BROTHERHOOD

and other pieces

by H. P. Lovecraft
& diverse hands

Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin, 53583; 1966; 321pp.; \$5.00.

"Very probably", writes August Derleth in the brief introduction, "this volume offers the last of the hitherto uncollected material by or about H. P. Lovecraft, and it is, at best, a minor item for collectors. Yet, it is the first publication for two Lovecraft works — *Suggestions for a Reading Guide* and *Alfredo* . . ."

The story which gives this volume its title, *The Dark Brotherhood*, is a Lovecraft-Derleth collaboration; and, as is the case with all such, has been worked out and written by Derleth from HPL's notes and fragments — but is not the completion of a story Lovecraft had outlined completely, or had started but left unfinished when he died. Mr. Derleth's pastiches of Lovecraft are no more slavish imitations of HPL than his "Solar Pons" stories slavishly imitate the style of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; but in both instances we get a reminiscent feeling and some of the outstanding defects or faults of the original have been avoided. The story is a good one.

"Minor" though this volume is, I find that I can separate the contents

into three categories: of major interest, of lesser interest, and of little interest. I shall not attempt to "rate" material within these three headings, but list them in order of their appearance.

OF MAJOR INTEREST: *Suggestions for a Reading Guide*, for its light on what HPL considered worth recommendation; *The Lovecraft "Books"*: *Some Addenda and Corrigenda*, by Willis Scott Home; for its evidences of HPL's erudition; *To Arkham and the Stars*, by Fritz Leiber, a completely delightful and loving spoof; *Through Hyper-space with Brown Jenkin*, by Fritz Leiber, showing how much of modern science fiction HPL anticipated: *Lovecraft and the New England Megaliths*, by Andrew E. Rothovius, indicating HPL's solid base in archaeology; *Howard Phillips Lovecraft: A Bibliography*, by Jack Chalker, more nearly complete than the one in *Miner* and anywhere else; *The Making of a Hoax*, by August Derleth, on the birth and continuing life of the *Necronomicon*; and *Final Notes*, by August Derleth, largely a reprint of the out-of-print, *Some Notes on H. P. Lovecraft*.

OF LESSER INTEREST: *Three Stories by C. M. Eddy, Jr.* The first, *The Loved Dead*, suggests why HPL was attracted, as it is filled with the same over-use of adjectives that you find in the Lovecraft stories. HPL's re-

(turn to page 55)

Divine Madness

by Roger Zelazny

(author of *But Not the Herald*)

To the list of notables in the world of imaginative fiction, wherein we find such names as Isaac Asimov, R. W. Lowndes, and E. A. van Vogt, we must now add Roger Zelazny, who you saw in our last issue. Needless to say, he is better known as Roger Zelazny and, having gone through the required ceremony of sackcloth and ashes, we pledge our efforts to keep it this way.

"... I IS THIS *Phearers*
wounded-wonder like a and
them makes and stars wander-
ing the conjures sorrow of phrase
Whose . . ."

He blew smoke through the cigarette and it grew longer.

He glanced at the clock and realized that its hands were moving backwards.

The clock told him that it was 10:33, going on 10:32 in the P.M.

Then came the thing like despair, for he knew there was not a thing he could do about

it. He was trapped, moving in reverse through the sequence of actions past. Somehow, he had missed the warning.

Usually, there was a prism-effect, a flash of pink static, a drowsiness, then a moment of heightened perception . . .

He turned the pages, from left to right, his eyes retracing their path back along the lines.

"Pamphasis an such bears grief whose he is What"

Helpless, there behind his eyes, he watched his body perform.

The cigarette had reached its full length. He clicked on the lighter, which sucked away its glowing point, and then he shook the cigarette back into the pack.

He yawned in reverse: first an exhalation, then an inhalation.

It wasn't real — the doctor had told him. It was grief and epilepsy, meeting to form an unusual syndrome.

He'd already had the seizure. The Dialantin wasn't helping. This was a post-traumatic locomotor hallucination, elicited by anxiety, precipitated by the attack.

But he did not believe it, could not believe it — not after twenty minutes had gone by, in the other direction — not after he had placed the book upon the reading stand, stood, walked backward across the room to his closet, hung up his robe, redressed himself in the same shirt and slacks he had worn all day, backed over to the bar and regurgitated a Martini, sip by cooling sip, until the glass was filled to the brim and not a drop spilled.

There was an impending taste of olive, and then everything was changed again.

The second-hand was sweeping around his wristwatch in the proper direction.

The time was 10:07.

He felt free to move as he wished.

He redrank his Martini.

Now, if he would be true to the pattern, he would change into his robe and try to read. Instead, he mixed another drink.

Now the sequence would not occur.

Now the things would not happen as he thought they had happened, and un-happened.

Now everything was different.

All of which went to prove it had been an hallucination.

Even the notion that it had taken twenty-six minutes each way was an attempted rationalization.

Nothing had happened.

. . . Shouldn't be drinking, he decided. It might bring on a seizure.

He laughed.

Crazy, though, the whole thing . . .

Remembering, he drank.

IN THE MORNING he skipped breakfast, as usual, noted that it would soon stop being morning, took two aspirins, a lukewarm shower, a cup of coffee, and a walk.

The park, the fountain, the children with their boats, the grass, the pond, he hated them; and the morning, and the sunlight, and the blue moats around the towering clouds.

Hating, he sat there. And remembering.

If he was on the verge of a

crackup, he decided, then the thing he wanted most was to plunge ahead into it, not to totter halfway out, halfway in.

He remembered why.

But it was clear, so clear, the morning, and everything crisp and distinct and burning with the green fires of spring, there in the sign of the Ram, April.

He watched the winds pile up the remains of winter against the far gray fence, and he saw them push the boats across the pond, to come to rest in shallow mud the children tracked.

The fountain jetted its cold umbrella above the green-tinged copper dolphins. The sun ignited it whenever he moved his head. The wind rumbled it.

Clustered on the concrete, birds pecked at part of a candy bar stuck to a red wrapper.

Kites swayed on their tails, nosed downward, rose again, as youngsters tugged at invisible strings. Telephone lines were tangled with wooden frames and torn paper, like broken G clefs and smeared glissandos.

He hated the telephone lines, the kites, the children, the birds.

Most of all, though, he hated himself.

How does a man undo that which has been done? He doesn't. There is no way under the sun. He may suffer, remember, repent, curse, or forget. Nothing else. The past, in this sense, is inevitable.

A woman walked past. He

did not look up in time to see her face, but the dusky blonde fall of her hair to her collar and the swell of her sure, sheer-netted legs below the black hem of her coat and above the matching click of her heels heigh-ho, stopped his breath behind his stomach and snared his eyes in the wizard-weft of her walking and her posture and some more, like a rhyme to the last of his thoughts.

He half-rose from the bench when the pink static struck his eyeballs, and the fountain became a volcano spouting rainbows.

The world was frozen and served up to him under glass.

... The woman passed back before him and he looked down too soon to see her face.

The hell was beginning once more, he realized, as the backward-flying birds passed before

He gave himself to it. Let it keep him until he broke, until he was all used up and there was nothing left.

He waited, there on the bench, watching the shitey toves be brillig, as the fountain sucked its waters back within itself, drawing them up in a great arc above the unmoving dolphins, and the boats raced backward across the pond, and the fence divested itself of stray scraps of paper, as the birds replaced the candy bar within the red wrapper, bit by crunchy bit.

His thoughts only were inviolate, his body belonged to the retreating tide.

Eventually, he rose and strolled backwards out of the park.

On the street a boy backed past him, unwhistling snatches of a popular song.

He backed up the stairs to his apartment, his hangover growing worse again, undrank his coffee, unshowered, unswallowed his aspirins, and got into bed, feeling awful.

Let this be it, he decided.

A faintly-remembered nightmare ran in reverse through his mind, giving it an undeserved happy ending.

IT WAS DARK when he awakened.

He was very drunk.

He backed over to the bar and began spitting out his drinks, one by one into the same glass he had used the night before, and pouring them from the glass back into the bottles again. Separating the gin and vermouth was no trick at all. The proper liquids leapt into the air as he held the uncorked bottles above the bar.

And he grew less and less drunk as this went on.

Then he stood before an early Martini and it was 10:07 in the P.M. There, within the hallucination, he wondered about another hallucination. Would time loop-the-loop, forward and then

backward again, through his previous seizure?

No.

It was as though it had not happened, had never been.

He continued on back through the evening, undoing things.

He raised the telephone, said "good-bye", untold Murray that he would not be coming to work again tomorrow, listened a moment, recradled the phone and looked at it as it rang.

The sun came up in the west and people were backing their cars to work.

He read the weather report and the headlines, folded the evening paper and placed it out in the hall.

It was the longest seizure he had ever had, but he did not really care. He settled himself down within it and watched as the day unwound itself back to morning.

His hangover returned as the day grew smaller, and it was terrible when he got into bed again.

When he awakened the previous evening the drunkenness was high upon him. Two of the bottles he refilled, recorked, resealed. He knew he would take them to the liquor store soon and get his money back.

As he sat there that day, his mouth uncursing and undrinking and his eyes unreading, he knew that new cars were being shipped back to Detroit and disassembled, that corpses were

awakening into their death-throes, and that priests the world over were saying black mass, unknowing.

He wanted to chuckle, but he could not tell his mouth to do it.

He smoked two and a half packs of cigarettes.

Then came another hangover and he went to bed. Later, the sun set in the east.

TIME'S winged chariot fled before him as he opened the door and said "good-bye" to his comforters and they came in and sat down and told him not to grieve overmuch.

And he wept without tears as he realized what was to come.

Despite his madness, he hurt.

. . . Hurt, as the days rolled backward.

. . . Backward, inexorably.

. . . Inexorably, until he knew the time was near at hand.

He gnashed the teeth of his mind.

Great was his grief and his hate and his love.

He was wearing his black suit and undrinking drink after drink, while somewhere the men were scraping the clay back onto the shovels which would be used to undig the grave.

He backed his car to the funeral parlor, parked it, and climbed into the limousine.

They backed all the way to the graveyard.

He stood among his friends and listened to the preacher.

"dust to dust; ashes to Ashes," the man said, which is pretty much the same whichever way you say it.

The casket was taken back to the hearse and returned to the funeral parlor.

He sat through the service and went home and unshaved and unbrushed his teeth and went to bed.

He awakened and dressed again in black and returned to the parlor.

The flowers were all back in place.

Solemn-faced friends unsigned the Sympathy Book and unshook his hand. Then they went inside to sit awhile and stare at the closed casket. Then they left, until he was alone with the funeral director.

Then he was alone with himself.

The tears ran up his cheeks.

His suit and shirt were crisp and unwrinkled again.

He backed home, undressed, uncombed his hair. The day collapsed around him into morning, and he returned to bed to unsleep another night.

THE PREVIOUS evening, when he awakened, he realized where he was headed.

Twice, he exerted all of his will power in an attempt to interrupt the sequence of events. He failed.

He wanted to die. If he had killed himself that day, he would not be headed back toward it now.

There were tears within his mind as he realized the past which lay less than twenty-four hours before him.

The past stalked him that day as he unnegotiated the purchase of the casket, the vault, the accessories.

Then he headed home into the biggest hangover of all and slept until he was awakened to undrink drink after drink and then return to the morgue and come back in time to hang up the telephone on that call, that call which had come to break . . .

. . . The silence of his anger with its ringing.

She was dead.

She was lying somewhere in the fragments of her car on Interstate 90 now.

As he paced, unsmoking, he knew she was lying there bleeding.

. . . Then dying, after that crash at 80 miles an hour.

. . . Then alive?

Then re-formed, along with the car, and alive again, arisen? Even now backing home at a terrible speed, to re-slam the door on their final argument? To unscream at him and to be unscreamed at?

He cried out within his mind. He wrung the hands of his spirit.

It couldn't stop at this point. No. Not now.

All his grief and his love and his self-hate had brought him back this far, this near to the moment . . .

It *couldn't* end now.

After a time, he moved to the living room, his legs pacing, his lips cursing, himself waiting.

THE DOOR slammed open.

She stared in at him, her mascara smeared, tears upon her cheeks.

"Hell to go Then," he said.

"I going I'm," she said.

She stepped back inside, closed the door.

She hung her coat hurriedly in the hall closet.

"It about feel you way the that's If," he said, shrugging.

"I yourself but anybody about care don't You," she said.

"Child a like behaving You're," he said.

"Sorry you're say least at could You"

Her eyes flashed like emeralds through the pink static, and she was lovely and alive again. In his mind he was dancing.

The change came.

"You could at least say you're sorry!"

"I am," he said, taking her hand in a grip that she could not break. "How much, you'll never know.

"Come here," and she did.

Valley Of The Lost

by Robert E. Howard

(author of *Skulls in the Stars*, *Rattle of Bones*)

Those veteran readers who bought the January 1933 issue of *STRANGE TALES* in the autumn of 1932 will remember that, among the stories announced for the subsequent issue was *Valley of the Lost*, by Robert E. Howard. Alas, the Clayton line went under, and there never was another issue of Clayton's *STRANGE TALES* under the editorship of Harry Bates. The next year, when we read *Valley of the Worm*, by Robert E. Howard, in *WEIRD TALES* (February 1934), we thought that this, of course, was the story that had originally been announced for *ST*. And there matters rested until last year, when we received a retyped mss. from Glenn Lord, with the title of *King of the Lost People*, by Robert E. Howard — a story which had not been published previously — and a note to the effect that this was the story that would have appeared in the Clayton magazine.

We read it and wrote to Mr. Lord that it did, indeed, read like a Howard mss., and that the earlier title could fit it; but knowing how skillfully an ingenious imitator can simulate another author's style, we wanted to see that old, yellow mss. from which Mr. Lord said he had made this transcript; we owed it both to our readers and ourselves to examine the original. Mr. Lord graciously loaned us the original, which we compared word-for-word with the transcript; and having seen other original mss. of Howard's we were convinced that this was genuine.

Now on the title page of this original (which also bore the title, *Kink of the Lost People*) was a mark which indicated that another, smaller paper had been attached to it for a long time. Mr. Lord also included a rejection slip from ASTOUNDING STORIES, dated late 1933, wherein Desmond Hall (assistant editor for Street & Smith at the time that they first revived the title), regretfully returned the mss. *Valley of the Lost*, inasmuch as he felt that it was more of a weird tale than science fiction, and the comment received from readers on the first issues of the revived ASTOUNDING (which mingled weird and science fiction, as did the first few issues of the original Clayton ASTOUNDING STORIES or SUPER-SCIENCE in 1930) did not approve of the weird and supernatural material.

The mystery deepens. Had Howard revised *Valley of the Lost*, putting a new title upon it, with a science-fiction touch for the S & S ASTOUNDING STORIES? Had *King of the Lost People* been the original title, changed to *Valley of the Lost* by Harry Bates? (In which case, was there no revision at all?) If this were the same story, revised or not, title changed or not, why did Hall refer to *Valley of the Lost* as being enclosed with this rejection slip? (There is no reference to *King of the Lost People*.) A possible solution of the difficulty could be this: Desmond Hall was also assistant editor of the Clayton STRANGE TALES. If the story he rejected in 1933 was the same one (either completely or essentially) that had been accepted for STRANGE TALES, whether Howard or Bates had changed the title, then it is possible that he still thought of it as *Valley of the Lost*, and so referred to it in his rejection slip.

Mr. Lord, and L. Sprague de Camp, think that this is that same story. And since STRANGE TALES did use some science-fiction-like material, such as Frank Belknap Long's *In the Lair of the Space-Monsters* (October 1932) the tale might have had that touch from the very beginning. My own conclusion is to pass: this could be that long-lost Howard tale, but I am not 100% convinced; I still hold the suspicion that *Valley of the Lost* became *Valley of the Worm* in 1934. In any event, this is a typical Howard story of the later period, when he was beginning to move toward science fiction of the Burroughs variety, as he did in the novel *Almuric*, presently available as an Ace Book. (F305).

JIM BRILL licked his parched lips, staring about him with bloodshot eyes. Behind him lay the sand, blown in curving ridges and long ripples; before him rose the stark outlines of the nameless mountains which were his goal. The sun hung above the western horizon, dull

gold in the evil of dust which turned the sky a sickly yellow and lent its taste to the very air he breathed.

Yet he was thankful for it; but for the sand storm, he would have shared the fate which had overtaken his guides and servants.

The attack had come at dawn. From behind a bare ridge which had concealed their approach, a swarm of squat riders on shaggy horses had rushed the camp, howling like devils, shooting and slashing. In the midst of the fight the storm had brought blinding clouds of dust rolling over the desert, and through it Jim Brill had fled, knowing that he alone remained alive of the expedition which had toiled so far on its strange quest.

Now, after a grind that had taxed to the uttermost the powers of himself and his steed, he saw nothing of his pursuers, though the dust which still hung over the desert limited the range of his vision considerably.

He had been the only white man in the expedition. His previous experiences with Mongol bandits told him that they would not let him escape if they could help it.

Brill's equipment consisted of the .45 at his hip, a canteen with a few drops of water remaining in it, and the weary horse which drooped under his weight after the long flight.

Mindful of this, the man swung down from the saddle and plodded on, leading the animal. He scanned the rugged slopes ahead of him without hope. Sure death awaited him in the desert; what the mountains held, he could not know. No man knew what lay in this

unexplored region. If any white man had ever entered it, he had never come out alive to tell what he had found.

The horse snorted suddenly and threw up its head, pulling back on the rein. Brill swore wearily and tried to quiet it. Its eyes rolled and its haunches quivered. Uneasily he looked about him. They were entering the narrow mouth of a canyon, the rocky floor of which sloped upward. The sides were steep, broken by jutting ledges. On one of these ledges, that overhanging the canyon mouth, something moved, scuttled behind a boulder. Brill had a vague impression of something bulky and hairy that moved in a manner which suggested neither man nor beast.

He swung wide of that ledge, hugging the opposite wall. When they were even with it, the horse shied and snorted, but quieted after they had passed on. Whatever the animal feared was crouching up there among the boulders.

Brill was meditating on that matter as he went on up the canyon when it was swept out of his mind by a sound that galvanized him — the drum of hoofs! He wheeled, the fear of a trapped wolf clutching him. Over the sands, heading for the canyon mouth, raced a cluster of riders — ten squat figures in wolf skins, flogging their horses and brandishing their sabers in

exultation. The storm had not thrown them off his track. Now they had seen him, and they gave tongue stridently.

Brill let go the reins and dropped behind a rock, drawing his .45. They did not pull their rifles from the boots beneath their knees. They knew their prey was trapped, and their lust for slaughter with cold steel overcame their caution.

BRILL SIGHTED across the crest of the boulder at the foremost horseman. He mechanically judged the distance, intending to shoot just as the man came even with the overhanging ledge, under which his course was taking him. But that shot was never fired.

Just as the Mongol swept under the ledge, some sound or instinct caused him to look upward. As he did so, his yellow face went ashy; with a scream he threw up his arms. And simultaneously something black and hairy shot from the ledge and struck full on his breast, knocking him from his horse.

The men behind yelled in dismay and jerked their mounts back on their haunches; above their clamor rose a scream of mortal agony. The horses wheeled and bolted, neighing shrilly.

The fallen Mongol writhed on the canyon floor, pinned beneath a shape that was like the figment of a nightmare. Brill

glared at it, frozen with amazement. It was a spider, beyond the maddest dreams of spiders.

It was like a tarantula, with a gross body bristling with stiff hairs, and crouching black legs; but it was fully as big as a hog. Beneath it the shrieks of the Mongol ceased in a bubbling gurgle and his straining limbs went limp.

The other desert men had halted outside the canyon mouth, and one lifted a rifle and fired at the thing, but obviously his nerves were badly shaken. The bullet splatted harmlessly on a rock. As if disturbed by the sound, the monster turned in their direction, and with wild yells, the Mongols wheeled away and raced off across the sands in ignominious flight.

Brill watched them dwindle to black dots in the dust, then he rose gingerly from behind his rock. His horse had bolted away up the canyon. Twilight was approaching, and he was alone in the gorge with that hairy monstrosity which crouched like a black ogre over the man it had killed.

He hoped to steal away up the canyon without molestation; but the moment he rose into full view, the monster abandoned its prey and scuttled toward him at appalling speed.

Sweating with candid fright, Brill sighted at the oncoming black buk and pulled the trig-

ger. The impact of the big bullet knocked the thing sidewise, but it righted itself and came on, its eyes gleaming redly among its black bristles. Again and again the gum cracked, waking the echoes among the cliffs, before the monster tumbled over, working its hairy legs vainly. Then from all sides sounded a sinister rustling, and Brill shivered as he saw a grisly horde swarm down into the canyon. They seemed to emerge from every cranny, all converging on the stricken bulk quivering on the gorge floor. None were so large as it, but all were big enough and horrible enough to make a man doubt his sanity.

THEY ignored Brill, and fell on their mangled king as wolves fall on the wounded pack-leader. The giant was hidden in a writhing, working mass of black and gray-banded bodies, and Brill hurried up the canyon before they could finish their grisly repast and turn their attention to him.

He went up into the mountains because he dared not go down the gorge past that working hill of death; because only death by thirst lay in the desert beyond the canyon; and because it was to find these hills that he had plunged into the Gobi in the first place. Jim Brill was looking for a man; a man whom he hated more than any-

one else on earth, yet for whom he was ready to risk his life.

IT WAS CERTAINLY not love for Richard Barlow, eminent scientist and explorer, which had sent Brill on his quest; he had his own reasons and they were sufficient. Following dim clues and cryptic hints dropped by natives, he had concluded that the man he sought, if he still lived, was to be found in the mysterious hills which stood in an unmapped region of the Gobi. And he believed that these were the hills for which he had sought.

He emerged from the canyon into a wild tangle of cliffs and ravines. There was no vegetation, no water; the ridges rose grim and stark and black in the dusk about him. He thought of the great spiders, and strained his ears for the stealthy rustle of hairy legs, but the land lay desolate as the earth before man's creation. The rising moon carved out black shadows of turreted cliffs, and showed him a dim path winding dizzily upward — a man-made trail that betokened human habitation somewhere.

He followed it; it wound up between sheer cliffs to a notch that showed a square of star-flecked sky. When he reached this he halted, panting from his exertions, and grunted with surprise. A heavy chain was stretched across the notch. With

his hands resting on it, he gazed through the pass. It was narrow and beyond it a long slope fell away into a valley where water gleamed in the moonlight among dense droves of trees. And something else gleamed among the trees — towers and walls, apparently of white marble.

Then the native tales were true, and there was a city among these hills. But what manner of men dwelt there? Even as the thought crossed his mind, something moved in the shadow of the cliffs. He caught a glimpse of a tall black figure with a curiously misshapen head, from which blazed eyes like balls of bale-fire. A choking cry escaped his lips. No human ever had eyes like that.

Gripping the chain to steady himself, he snatched at his revolver. And in that instant the universe burst around him, showering the sky with red sparks which were instantly quenched in the blackness of utter oblivion.

WHEN JIM BRILL regained his senses, his first impression was that he was lying on something soft and yielding to his rugged frame. There floated before him the soft pale oval of a face with dark, oblique eyes. A voice spoke somewhere, a familiar voice, but framed in an unfamiliar accent, and the face vanished. And then Jim Brill

was fully conscious, and staring about him.

He lay on a satin divan in a chamber whose ceiling was a fretted dome. Satin hangings, worked with gilt dragons, adorned the walls, and thick carpets littered the floor.

This he saw in a sweeping glance, before his whole attention was riveted on the figure which sat before him. This was a heavily-built man, whose incongruous robe of watered silk did not conceal the muscularity of his frame. A velvet cap was on his head, and from under this gleamed cold gray eyes, matching the rugged hardness of his features. It was the aggressive jut of the jaw that woke recognition in Brill.

"Barlow!"

He sat up, gripping the edge of the divan glaring at the other as at one risen from the dead.

"Yes, it's I." The man's voice was sardonic. "Fancy you dropping in on me like this."

"I was hunting you, blast you!" bristled Brill; yes, this was Barlow, all right, with his gift of putting Brill's teeth on edge.

"Hunting me?" The surprise in Barlow's tone was genuine.

"Oh, it wasn't through any love of you," growled Brill. "I wasn't losing any sleep over you."

"Why, then?"

"Great Judas, man, can't you guess?" exclaimed Brill irritably. "Gloria . . ."

"Oh!" Barlow's expression was strange, as if he had just had recalled to his mind something he had forgotten. "So my wife sent you?"

"Naturally. She waited four years. Nobody knew whether you were alive or dead. You'd simply vanished into inner Mongolia. No word ever came back. Gloria came to me, because she knew no one else to come to. She financed the expedition, and here I am."

"And disgusted to find me alive," bantered Barlow. Brill merely grunted; he was far too straight-forward for hypocrisy.

"What happened to me?" he demanded. "What was that devil-thing I glimpsed just before I went out?"

"Just one of my servants in a robe and hood, with phosphorescent eyes painted on it. A little trick to discourage our superstitious neighbors, the Mongols. This faithful servant knocked you out by merely doing as I have taught him to do. He's one of the guards of the pass. He pushed a little handle and sent some electricity shooting along the chain you were leaning against. If he hadn't seen you were white, you'd be dead now."

BRILL GLANCED at his hand. He knew nothing about electricity, but he had a vague idea that a shock hard enough to knock him senseless would

be enough to burn his hand off.

"No burns on you," Barlow assured him. "You've seen men knocked cold by lightning without being burnt, haven't you? Same principle. I can control electricity as easily as I write my name. I know more about it than any other man in the world."

"Modest as usual," grunted Brill.

Barlow smiled with contemptuous tolerance. He had changed subtly in four years. There was more poise about him, a greater air of superiority. And there was a dim difference in his face: in his complexion, in the shape of his eyes — Brill could not place it, but it was there, somewhere. And his voice sounded almost unfamiliar at times.

"What is this dump, anyway?" Brill offered a strong contrast, in his dust-stained shirt, breeches and boots, to the exotic chamber and the figure in the embroidered silk. Brill was as tall and heavy as Barlow, a broad-shouldered, thick-chested man, with muscular arms and a nervous energy that could fire him to the quickness of a big cat.

"This is the city of Khor," said Barlow, as if that explained everything.

"Khor's a myth," grunted Brill. "I've heard the Mongols spinning their lies about it . . ."

Barlow smiled coldly. "You are in the position of the farm-

er who looked at a giraffe and refused to admit its existence. Khor exists and you are at this instant lying in its royal palace."

"Then where's the king?" demanded Brill sarcastically.

Barlow bowed with mock modesty, then folded his hands in his lap and looked at Brill with eyes that glistened between slitted lids. Brill was aware of a vague uneasiness. There was something wrong with his appearance.

"You mean you're the boss of this city?" he asked incredulously.

"And of this valley. Oh, it was not difficult. The people are grossly superstitious. I brought a whole laboratory on camels. My electrical devices alone convinced them that I was a mighty magician. I was the power behind the throne of their king, old Khitai Khan, until he was killed in a Mongol raid. Then I stepped into his shoes without any trouble; he had no heirs. I'm not only the big sorcerer of Khor; I'm Ak Khan, the White King."

"Who are these people?"

"A mixed race, Mongolian and Turkish, originally, with a strain of Chinese. Did you ever hear of Genghis Khan?"

"Who hasn't?" snapped Brill impatiently.

"Well, as you know, he conquered most of Asia in the early thirteenth century. He destroyed many cities, but he also

built a few. This was his pleasure city, and was erected by skilled Persian architects. He filled it with slaves, both men and women. When he died, the world forgot about Khor, far up in these isolated mountains. The descendants of those slaves have lived on here ever since, under their own *khans*, raising their food in the valley, getting other things they wanted from the few Mongol traders who visited the hills."

He clapped his hands. "I was forgetting. You'll be hungry."

Brill's eyes widened as a slender silk-clad figure glided lithely into the chamber. "Then she wasn't a dream," he muttered.

"Scarcely!" Barlow laughed. "The Mongols stole her from a Chinese caravan, and sold her to me. Her name is Lala Tzu."

CHINESE WOMEN held no attraction for Brill, but this girl was undeniably beautiful. Her oblique eyes glowed with a soft fire, her features were delicately molded, and her slender body was a marvel of suppleness.

"Dancing girl," decided Brill, as he set to work ravenously on the food and wine she set before him. From the corner of his eye, he saw her pass a slender arm about Barlow's shoulder and whisper some soft endearment into his ear. The man shrugged away from her with a show of impatience, and mo-

tioned her out of the room. Her slender shoulders drooped as if from a rebuke as she obeyed.

"Feel like seeing the city?" Barlow asked abruptly. Brill rose with a snort of disgust that such a question should be deemed necessary.

But as they left the chamber he realized that he had lain senseless for hours. Outside it was full daylight. Barlow led him through a series of hallways and out into a small open court, surrounded on three sides by galleries letting on to the palace, and on the third by a low wall. Over this wall Brill looked down into the city, in the midst of which the palace stood on a low hill. It was much like other Oriental towns, with market squares, open stalls with goods displayed, and flat-topped houses. The main differences were in the unusual cleanliness and the richness of the buildings. The houses were of marble instead of mud, and the streets were paved with the same material.

"Quarries of marble in these hills," grunted Barlow, as if reading Brill's thoughts. "Made them clean things up after I got to be khan. Didn't want plagues breeding in filth."

Brill had a good view of the valley, which was walled in by sheer cliffs. Besides the pass through which he had been brought, and up to which a sort of natural ramp led, there was

no break in the massive palisades. A stream flowed through the valley, and the vegetation which crowded its banks was relieving after the barren monotony of the outer desert. Gardens, with small huts, checkered the valley floor, and sheep and cattle grazed up to the very wall of the city, which was of no great extent, though rather densely populated.

THE inhabitants moved indolently through the streets in their silk garments. Their skins were yellowish, their faces round and flat, their slanted eyes dreamy. They seemed to Brill the remnants of a race which had fulfilled their destiny and now waited drowsily for death.

Barlow's servants were of a different breed, lean, dark-skinned men from Tonkin, who seldom spoke but looked quick and dangerous as cats. Barlow said he had brought them with him to Khor.

"I suppose you're wondering why I came here in the first place," Barlow remarked. "Well, I was always cramped in America. Fools with their stupid laws were always interfering. I heard of this place and it sounded ideal for my purposes. It is. I've gone beyond the wildest dreams of western scientists. Nobody interferes with me. Here human life means nothing; the will of the ruler everything."

Brill scowled at the implica-

tion. "You mean you experiment with human subjects?"

"Why not? These servants of mine live only to do my bidding, and the Khoranese consider me a priest of Erlik, the god they have worshipped since time immemorial. The subjects I demand of them are no more than offerings to the god, according to their way of thinking. I only sacrifice them to the cause of science."

"To the cause of the devil" growled Brill, revolted. "Don't pull that stuff with me. You care nothing about the progress of humanity. All you've ever considered has been your own ambitions."

BARLOW LAUGHED without resentment. "At any rate, my will is the only law there is in Khor — a fact you'll do well to remember. If I occasionally use one of these fat fools in an experiment from which he fails to recover, I also protect them. They used to suffer from the raids of the Mongols before I came. The only way into the valley is through that pass, but even so, the raiders often cut their way through and devastated everything outside the city walls. Sooner or later, they'd have destroyed the city itself.

"I barred the pass with that electric chain, and have done other things that scared the Mongols so badly they seldom venture into the hills. I have a

machine in a dome of this palace, for instance, that any world power would pay a fortune for if they knew it."

"Those big spiders . . ." began Brill.

"More of my work. They were originally tiny creatures which inhabited caves in the hills. I found a way to make carnivorous monsters out of them. Good watch dogs. The Mongols fear them out of all proportion to their actual ability to do harm. Developing them was a triumph, but I've gone far beyond that now. I am now exploring the profoundest of all mysteries."

"What's that?"

"The human mind; the ego, spirit, soul. Call it what you will. It remains the primary essence of life. Too long men have dabbled in what they called the occult, after the fashion of witch-doctors. It's time the mystery was approached in a scientific manner. I have so approached it."

"Well, listen," said Brill abruptly. "I came a long way to find you, thinking you were a prisoner of a hill tribe. Now I find you master of the tribe, and here of your own free will. You might at least have sent word to Gloria."

"How?" demanded Barlow. "None of my servants could have got through alive, and I couldn't trust a Mongol trader to get a letter outside. Anyway,

when a man is absorbed in his life's work, he can't worry himself about a woman."

"Not even his wife, eh?" sneered Brill, his resentment growing every minute. "Well, now I've found you, I want to know, are you coming back to America with me?"

"Certainly not."

"What shall I tell Gloria?"

"Tell her whatever you choose; you will anyway."

Brill's big fists clenched. The man's attitude was intolerable. But before he could make the savage reply which framed itself on his lips, Barlow said: "I'll show you my latest triumph. You won't understand it, and maybe you won't believe it. But it's too big for me to keep still about. I've got to show it to some white man, even you."

AS BARLOW led the way back through the corridors, Brill saw a slim hand draw aside a hanging, and the face of Lala Tzu was framed in the dark velvet. Her eyes rested meltingly on Barlow, then grew hard and bright with anger as they turned toward Brill. Evidently, the girl resented his presence. Doubtless she understood English and had overheard enough of their conversation to fear that Brill was going to take her master back to America with him.

Barlow halted before an arch-

ed door of lacquered teak on which writhed a golden dragon. An antique lock was manipulated by an equally antique key, and Barlow led Brill into the chamber.

Above it rose a dome inlaid with gold and ivory. The walls, of a strange, softly glistening green stone, were not tapestried. The floor was of the same material. There were no windows, the dome being craftily pierced so as to let in enough light to dimly illuminate the interior. The only furniture was a satin divan.

"This is the meditation chamber of the great *khan*, Genghis," said Barlow. "He alone entered it during his life-time, and after his death, none crossed the threshold until I came. Here he sat and dreamed the dreams induced by wine, opium and *bhang*. Here I first conceived my great discovery.

"Everything leaves its impression on its surroundings, sights, sounds, even thought, for thought is a tangible force, invisible only because on a different plane than visible substance. When a man occupies a room, he leaves the imprints of his personality on that room as surely as his fleshly feet leave their imprints in mud or sand. Wood, steel, stone, all are, in effect, potential camera films and phonographs whereon are imperishably recorded all sounds and scenes that have been in

their vicinity. But, in the case of the man in the room, other people come and go, leaving their impressions, too, and all these different impressions overlap each other and become hopelessly mixed and muddled.

"Naturally, some substances retain impressions longer and more clearly than others, just as mud retains a footprint more clearly than stone. These walls possess that quality to a phenomenal extent. There is no stone like this natural to the earth. I think it came from a meteorite which fell in this valley long ago, and which was sawed up and used for this purpose by the builders of Khor.

"These walls hold the thought-impressions of Genghis Khan, overlaid by no others, except mine, which are so few they scarcely count. They contain, indelibly imprinted, all the thoughts and dreams and ideas that made up the personality of the great conqueror. Imagine these walls as a camera film. On them I shall develop the pictures invisibly recorded by them!"

Brill grunted scornfully. "How? By waving a magic wand?"

"By processes I can no more make you understand than I could make a Congo savage understand television," answered Barlow imperturbably. "I'll tell you this much, that even you may be able to understand:

only a novice needs mechanical contrivances to aid him in psychic experiments. A master dispenses with artificial aids. He no more needs them than an athlete needs crutches, to use an example concrete enough for your low-grade mind to grasp.

"I HAVE DEVELOPED my psychic energy — I use the term for lack of a more explicit one. That energy is the real power of life; the brain itself is but one of its emanations, a machine through which it works. It needs no mechanical devices. Mechanics are but channels for its release. I have discovered how to release its terrific energy naturally.

"I will admit that the experiment I am now about to perform is made possible only by a strange series of circumstances, depending, ultimately, upon the marvelous quality of these walls. On this planet some people are psychic; here is an inanimate substance which is definitely psychic."

"But an abstract thought . . ."

"What is any personality but a material appearance embodying myriad abstractions? The universe is a giant chain, with each link inseparably interlocked with every other link. Some of these links we are cognizant of by our external senses, others only through our psychic powers, and then only when these are specially developed.

I merely frame an unseen link into a form recognizable by our external faculties.

"It is merely a matter of transmutation, of reduction to basic principles. Thoughts deal, ultimately, with material things. Emanations of the mentality which leave their impressions on material things, are transmutable into forms recognizable by the external senses. Watch!"

Barlow sank upon the divan and resting his elbows on his knees, dropped his chin in his hands and stared hypnotically at the opposite wall. A peculiar change passed over the atmosphere of the room; the light faded to a twilight gray. The even hue of the green walls altered with interchanging shades, like clouds passing over a dusky sky. Brill stared about uneasily. He saw only the bare, changing walls, the dim gray dome above them, and that cryptic figure sitting statue-like on the divan.

He looked again at the walls. Shadows flowed across them in endless procession; shapeless, nebulous, swiftly they passed. Sometimes a distortion of the dim light lent them the appearance of misshapen human figures. All converged upon the spot on which Barlow's mesmeric gaze was riveted. And at that point the green substance began to glow, to deepen, to take on the appearance of translucency. In its depths there were movement and unrest, a

merging of dim anthropomorphic shapes. As the shadows flowed into it, this amalgamation took on more distinct outlines. Brill smothered a cry. It was as if he looked into a deep green lake, and in its depths, mistily, he saw a human figure, a squat giant in silk robes. The outlines of the garments and body were vague and unstable, but the face stood out more distinctly beneath the velvet skull cap. It was a broad, immobile face with slanted gray eyes, and a wisp of a moustache drooping over wide, thin lips. *It was . . .*

THE CRY escaped Brill in spite of himself. He was on his feet, shaking like a leaf. Abruptly, the image vanished. The shadows faded, leaving the smooth green surface of the walls unclouded. Barlow was watching him cynically.

"Well?" inquired the scientist.

"It's a trick," snapped Brill. "You've got a picture projector hidden somewhere. I've seen Genghis Khan's face on old Chinese coins, and so have you. It wouldn't be hard for you to fake up something." But as he spoke, he was uncomfortably aware of the cold sweat pouring off his skin.

"I didn't expect you to believe it," retorted Barlow, sitting like a silk-clad Buddha. In the dim light the unpleasant change

in his countenance was more noticeable. It almost amounted to a deformity, and still Brill could not place it.

"What you believe matters little," said Barlow placidly. "I know the figure was Genghis Khan. No, not his ghost; not a phantom resurrected from the dead. But the combined total of his thoughts, dreams and memories, which together make up a sum as real and vital as the man himself. It is the man; for what is a man besides the total of his feelings, emotions, sensations and thoughts? Genghis Khan's body has been dust for centuries; but the immortal parts of him slumber in these walls. When they are materialized upon a visible plane, naturally they take on the aspect of the physical man from which they emanated.

"I have sat here for hours and watched the great khan grow more and more distinct until walls and chamber and time seemed to fade, until only he and my own mind seemed the only realities in the universe — until he seemed to flow into and merge with my own ego! I understand his dreams, conceptions, the secret of his power.

"To all great conquerors, to Caesar, Alexander, Napoleon, Genghis Khan, nature gave powers not possessed by other men. And I am acquiring the uncanny genius by which Genghis Khan, who was born in a

nomad's horse-hide tent, overthrew armies, kings, cities, empires!"

He had risen to his feet in his excitement, and now strode out into a curtained corridor, closing the lacquered door behind him.

"And what of it?" demanded Brill, who had naturally followed him.

"I, too, will become conqueror! My ego absorbs all the impressions left by his. I shall be emperor of Asia!"

"Bunkum!" snorted Brill. "I'm sick of listening to your pipe dreams. What I want to know is, are you ever coming back to America, and Gloria?"

"No; you are going to bring Gloria to me."

"What!" exclaimed Brill.

"Yes, I've decided. She'll fit very nicely into my schemes. She'll come if I send her a message; she is a dutiful wife."

"Entirely too much so," snarled Brill. "Otherwise, she'd have gotten a divorce long ago. Yes, she'd come. Not because she loves you. Her parents forced her into marrying you when she was only a child, and you've treated her like a dog; but she has an overdeveloped sense of duty. That's why she sent me looking for you. She and I have always loved one another. I hoped I'd find you dead. I'm sorry you're alive. But I'm not going to bring Gloria into this God-forsaken valley. What

about that Chinese girl, Lala Tzu? You have the nerve to . . ."

"Silence!" roared Barlow imperiously. "You shall bring my wife to me!"

"Why, you . . .!" Brill was on his feet, his big fists clenched. But before either could move, a slim figure darted into the scene from behind a hanging. It was Lala Tzu, her beautiful features contorted with fury.

"I heard!" she shrieked at Barlow. "You shall not bring another woman here! You shall not put me aside for a white woman! I will kill . . ."

HIS FACE convulsed with passion, Barlow struck her savagely in the face with his open hand, ripping out a volley of staccato gutturals Brill did not understand. Three lean silent Tonkinese glided into the hallway, laid hands on Lala Tzu and dragged her, kicking and screaming, through a curtained archway. There was the sound of a blow, a shriek of pain, then her passionate sobs dwindled as she was carried away.

Barlow stood posed like an image of imperial Oriental wrath, and Brill glared at him, his hair bristling with incredulous horror.

"I know now!" the explorer roared. "I've sensed a change in you, from the beginning! Your accent — it's Mongol! Your eyes have begun to slant; there's a copperish cast to your skin.

Those impressions you've raved about — you've absorbed them until they're changing you! *Changing you!* You damned devil — *you're changing into a Mongol!*"

A wild flood of devilish exultation lit Barlow's countenance.

"Yes!" he bellowed. "I said I was absorbing the mental emanations of Genghis Khan. *I will be Genghis Khan!* His personality will replace mine, because his is the stronger. Like him, I will conquer the world. I will fight the Mongols no longer, because I am becoming one of them. They will be my people; all Asians will be my people! I will make a gift to the chief of the Mongols and win his friendship. You shall return to America and bring me the little fool I married in a moment of weakness; she is beautiful; she shall be my gift to Togrukh Khan, the Mongol chief . . ."

With a maddened roar Brill drove at him, every nerve of his big muscular body straining with a primitive passion to smash and break and rip. With a guttural snarl, the powerful scientist met him breast to breast.

Brill scarcely felt the blows that rained on his face and body. In a red mist of berserk fury he drove Barlow backward, smashing his iron fists again and again into the hated features of his enemy, until the man crashed over backwards

among the ruins of a table, and Brill fell on him and sank his fingers into Barlow's bull throat. A worrying, wordless mouthing snarled from Brill's lips as he drove all the power of heavy shoulders and corded arms into his strangling hands. Blood from Barlow's torn throat trickled over Brill's fingers; the man's tongue protruded between blue lips; his eyes were glazing.

Men were swarming into the corridor, but Brill, in the fog of his wrath, was scarcely aware of their shouts, or of the hands which tore vainly at his corded forearms. Then a gun butt, swung with desperate force, crashed on his head and the lights went out.

BRILL CAME TO with a clear understanding of all that had occurred, and a fervent desire to renew the combat; but he was bound into a chair, hand and foot. Blood trickled into his eyes from a wound in his scalp. He shook his head to clear his vision, and saw Barlow facing him. Brill grinned wolfishly when he saw the damage he had done to the man's features. He knew that Barlow's nose was broken, and at least one of his ribs cracked. His face looked like a mask of raw beef, and his one good eye blazed fiendishly.

"Get out!" he croaked, choking with passion, and the impassive Tonkinese glided from

the chamber. Twisting his head to stare about, Brill decided that he had been brought to Barlow's laboratory. Scientific appliances of all kinds littered the large room, and huge glass jars contained grisly relics at which Brill did not care to look twice. He glanced back at Barlow, from whom all sanity seemed to have departed.

"You hoped to find me dead," the man was raving, "so you could go back and marry my wife! Well, I'm going to send you back to her. Do you see that thing there? That stuffed ape? Well, that's what you're going to look like within the hour. Laugh, you ignorant fool! Less than a month ago, that ape was a man, as intelligent and well developed as you are. I have discovered a process of degeneration that retrogrades the human into the beast which was his progenitor. I could go still further, and revert him to the protozoa which fathered us all.

"But I will leave you an ape. That specimen died, but you shall live — to prance and gibber in some zoo or circus! . . . You fool, do you realize what I'm saying? You'll be a beast! A filthy, hairy, verminous anthropoid! I'll send you back to my loving wife with my compliments . . ."

It happened so quickly it blurred Brill's sight. From a curtained arch, a lithe, tigerish

figure had sprung, wielding a gleaming shard of steel. He heard the impact of the blow, the man's grunt of agony. Then Barlow, his face a death-mask, took one reeling step and crumpled. His hands, emerging from the wide silk sleeves, worked spasmodically and were still. And Brill shuddered, for those hands were yellow-tinted and the nails were not those of a white man. Barlow's dead features were scarcely recognizable; their aspect was alien and unnatural.

Lala Tzu stood over the man she had killed, grasping her dagger, and staring with a fixed, wide-eyed stare at Brill. He gave back her stare in fascinated dread; this lovely girl was just as likely to kill him as she had killed the man she once had loved. Then he cried out an instinctive warning. Over her shoulder a yellow face peered through parted hangings. One of the Tonkinese servants glared at the body of his master. Lala Tzu cried out shrilly and sprang at him, lifting her dagger, but the face vanished, and in the corridor outside sounded a strident screaming. Lala Tzu stood up uncertainly.

"Cut me loose, girl!" Brill roared, tearing at his bonds. "I'll help you!"

In an instant she had reached him and slashed his cords. Casting about for a weapon, he saw a great Mongol scimitar hang-

ing on the wall. He tore it free just as the Tonkinese rushed in, daggers in their hands. Gripping the ponderous weapon with both hands, he heaved it above his head and flailed right and left. The razor edge sheared through flesh and bone, severing a man's head and shoulder from his body. Another screamed as his arm jumped from his shoulder on a spurting fountain of blood. The others gave back, appalled, then ran shrieking from the chamber. Brill glared after them, sickened at the havoc he had wrought, but fighting mad. Lala Tzu tugged at his arm.

"They have gone for guns!" she cried shrilly. "They will shoot us down like dogs! We can not escape from the palace, but there is a place where we can take refuge!"

HE FOLLOWED HER out of the chamber and along a corridor. Behind them the palace was in an uproar, and somewhere sounded a popping like that of many firecrackers. It seemed to come from outside the palace, but the din within was so furious Brill could not be certain. The girl's little feet pattered swiftly along the marble tiles ahead of him, until she came to a winding stair. Up this she went without hesitation. It wound up and up into a lofty dome. Brill's breath came in gasps before he reached

the top. Their pursuers were closer on their heels than he realized. Just as he reached the head of the stair and turned, a howling Tonkinese charged up and around the last turn with such headlong recklessness that he was thrusting a pistol into Brill's face before the American could move. The scimitar fell as the gun cracked; powder burnt Brill's face, and the Oriental's head caved in like an eggshell beneath the shearing blade. The impact of the stroke knocked the body backward down the stair where it demoralized the men storming up it.

Guns spat and bullets spattered against the wall, but Brill and the girl were out of sight around the last bend of the stair, and the natives dared not charge up around it in the teeth of those terrible sword-strokes. As he waited, sweat dripping from his face and both hands gripping the long hilt, Brill heard a sudden uproar beyond the palace walls. Those below heard it, and a sudden silence fell upon the stair. In the hush Brill heard a rising clamor of yells, and the cracking of many rifles. Lala Tzu cried out to him, and he risked his life by whirling and looking where she pointed.

They were under the arch of a lofty dome which was the pinnacle of the palace. On a platform was set what seemed to be a huge telescope, its muz-

zle protruding through a kind of loophole. Looking through a small window beside it, Brill could see the city streets below him, and the walls and the valley beyond. And he saw that doom had fallen on Khor.

Down the ramp that led from the pass swarmed chanting riders, and others raced around the valley, firing huts and shooting cattle in pure wantonness. Several hundreds more were thronged outside the great gate. Swinging a huge log between their horses like a battering ram, some were assailing the portal, while others kept up a withering fire at the defenders on the walls who strove to return their volleys. The Mongols were in the valley at last, despite all Barlow's barriers!

IN THE PALACE below, the clamor burst out afresh, and Brill wheeled toward the stair, sword lifted. But the attack did not come. A strident voice screamed in desperate urgency, and Lala Tzu, listening, turned to Brill.

"They say the Mongols will break down the gate and cut all their throats," she said "They beg you to save them. You, too, are a white magician, they think. They say a Mongol climbed the cliffs and shot the watcher at the pass before he could push the handle and make the chain impassable. They came in such numbers they did not fear

the spiders. They are led by Togrukh Khan, who does not fear the white man's magic. They swear they will obey you if you save them from the Mongols."

"How can I?" he asked helplessly.

"I will show you!" She caught his hand and drew him toward the great machine on the platform. "He always said he would use this if the Mongols reached the wall. See, it is aimed like a gun at the gate. He showed me — hold it so and pull the trigger!"

"Make them swear first they won't harm us," said Brill, and she called to the terrified Khoranese below. There was an answering babble, wild shouts, the sudden sound of heavy blows, then one voice shouting triumphantly.

"What was that?" he demanded nervously.

"The Tonkinese wished to kill us," she answered. "The men of Khor have slain them, and swear to obey you. Fear not. They will keep their word. Haste, the gate begins to buckle!"

It was true. The wretched Khoranese who had been trying to hold the portal scattered screaming. The gate crashed inward and the riders began swarming through, howling like wolves as they saw their helpless prey before them. Brill sighted along the great barrel and pulled the trigger. He ex-

pected some kind of a report, an explosion accompanied by a recoil. There was nothing of the sort. But from the flaring nozzle a long beam of blue light shot to the gate and the horde which thronged it. The result hideous.

For an instant there was a blurring in which nothing was distinct. Then an awful cry arose. The gate was choked with a blackened mass of disintegrated flesh and blackened bone that had been a hundred men and horses. That ray had neither burned nor shattered; by some awful force it had blasted into Eternity all that were crowded in the gate, and had cut a wide swatch through hordes massed outside. An instant the survivors sat stunned, then with mad screams they wheeled and flogged their steeds toward the hills, fighting like madmen to gain the pass. Brill watched, his soul revolted, until Lala Tzu touched his arm. On the stair below rose a paean of exultation.

"The people of Khor give thanks for their deliverance," said Lala Tzu, "and beg you mount the throne of Khitai Khan, which was the throne of Ak Khan, whom you have slain."

"Who I have slain?" grunted Brill. "That's a good one! Well, you tell the people of Khor that I thank them kindly, but all I want is horses and food and canteens of water. I want to get

out of this country while the Mongols are still running in another direction, and I want

to get back to America as quick as I can. Somebody's waiting for me there."



BOOKS (continued from page 29)

vising hand is visible in *Deaf, Dumb, and Blind*, and *The Ghost-Eater*. None of the three is hopelessly bad, but all three are badly flawed by by over-writing; *Walks with H. P. Lovecraft*, by C. M. Eddy, Jr., holds attention; *The Cancer of Superstition*, by H. P. Lovecraft and C. M. Eddy, Jr., is interesting in outline, and Eddy's draft from the outline is well-done, but amounts to little more than repetitiousness to one who has read the outline; *Lovecraft's Illustrators*, by John E. Vetter is a good assessment, and the plates are all good (I might add that all the photographs in the book are excellently chosen).

OF LITTLE INTEREST: *Alfredo*, by H. P. Lovecraft, is amusing, but too similar to what HPL considered "good" poetry, as horrifying evidenced by *What Belongs in Verse*, by H. P. Lovecraft — a well-done elaboration of Ezra Pound's statement, "What can be done as well in prose can be done better in prose," (though HPL may have been earlier); HPL's exhibit of bad poetry is very bad indeed, but his exhibit of "good" poetry is also very bad — and the *Six Poems* by H. P. Lovecraft, may not be his absolute worst, but are close enough to it. *Amateur Journalism: Its Possible Needs and Betterment*, by H. P. Lovecraft deals with experience generally common to amateur press groups.

For my taste, the items listed under the major interest category are worth the price of the book; and the others, even the worst, serve the purpose of giving a well-rounded portrait of a man who had strong virtues and strong defects in his writings. The jacket by Frank Utpatel is generally a good one, but the drawing of HPL himself doesn't quite come off for me. Nonetheless, for what this book is, I recommend it. RAWL

SOMETHING BREATHING

by Stanley McNail

Arkham House, Sauk City, Wisconsin 53583; 1965; 44pp; \$3.00

"It is not so often," reads the jacket blurb, "that so apt a blend of the sinister and the ironic are to be found in poetry as in this collection by Stanley McNail."

With this we are in hearty agreement; the verses are well-made and have content something beyond the usual level of this sort of poetry. I particularly appreciated "Metamorphosis" and "Night Things", but none of the 32 are less than good.

This is McNail's third collection of verses, though his second of macabre verse. The first was *Footsteps in the Attic*, while *The Black Hawk Country* deals with poems in reminiscence of his native Illinois. RAWL

Heredity

by David H. Keller

(author of *The Seeds of Death*)

First magazine publication of a story which appeared in the collection entitled *Life Everlasting*, this belongs in the canon of Keller "Tales Unpleasant" — but very effective. Our thanks to SAM MOSKOWITZ, who first reminded us of it.

DR. THEODORE OVERFIELD was impressed.

The size of the estate, the virgin timber, the large stone house, and above all, the high iron fence, which surrounded the place, indicated wealth and careful planning. The house was old, the trees were very old, but the fence was new. Its sharp, glistening pickets ranged upward, looking like bayonets on parade.

When he had accepted the invitation to make a professional visit to that home, he had counted on nothing more than a case of neurasthenia, perhaps an alcoholic psychosis or feminine hysteria. As he drove through the gateway and heard the iron shutters clank behind him, he was not so sure of its being a commonplace situation or an ordinary patient. A few deer ran, frightened, from the

roadside. They were pretty things. At least, they were one reason for the fence.

At the house, a surly, silent, servant opened the door and ushered him into a room that seemed to be the library. It not only held books in abundance, but it seemed that the books were used. Not many sets, but many odd volumes were there — evidently first editions. At one end of the room was a winged Mercury; at the other end, a snow-white Venus. Between them, on one side, was the fireplace with several inviting chairs.

"A week here with pay will not be half bad," mused the Doctor. But his pleasant thought was interrupted by the entrance of a small, middle-aged man, with young eyes, but with hair that would soon be white. He introduced himself.

"I am Peterson, the man who wrote to you. I presume that you are Dr. Overfield?"

The two men shook hands and sat down by the fireplace. It was early September, and the days were chill in the mountains.

"I understand that you are a psychiatrist, Dr. Overfield," the white-haired man began. "At least, I was told that you might be helpful to me in the solving of my problem."

"I do not know what your trouble is," answered the Doc-

tor, "but I have not made any appointments for the next week; so that time and my ability are at your disposal. You did not mention in your letters just what the trouble was. Do you care to tell me now?"

"Not now. Perhaps after dinner. You may be able to see for yourself. I am going to take you to your bedroom, and you may come down at six and meet the rest of the family."

The room that Overfield was taken to seemed comfortable in every way. Peterson left the room, hesitated, and came back.

"Just a word of advice, Doctor. When you are alone in here, be sure to keep the door locked."

"Shall I lock it when I leave?"

"No. That will not be necessary. No one will steal anything."

The Doctor shut the door, locked it according to advice, and went to the windows. They overlooked the woods. In the distance he could see a few deer. Nearer, white rabbits were playing on the lawn. It was a pretty view, but the windows were barred!

"A prison?" he asked himself.

"Bars on the windows! Advice to keep the door locked! What can he be afraid of? Evidently, not of thieves. Perhaps he has a phobia. I wonder whether all the rooms are barred. This seems interesting. And then that fence. It would be a brave man who would try to go over that, even with a ladder. He did not

impress me as being a neurasthenic, but, at the same time, he wanted to delay the interrogation. Evidently, he feels that it would be easier if I found out some things for myself."

The Doctor was tired from the long drive, so he took off his shoes and collar, and started to go to sleep. The silence was complete. The slightest sound was magnified into a startling intensity. Minutes passed. He thought that he heard a door-knob turn and was sure that it was his door, but no one knocked and there was no sound of footsteps. Later, thinking about everything, he went to sleep. It was growing dark when he awoke and looked at his watch. It was ten minutes to six. Just time enough to dash into his dinner clothes. He did not know whether people dressed for dinner at that place, but there was no harm in doing so.

DOWNSTAIRS, Peterson was waiting for him. Mrs. Peterson was also there. She must have known that the Doctor would dress for dinner; and, not wanting to embarrass him, also had dressed formally for the occasion. But her husband wore the same suit that he had on all day. He had even neglected to comb his hair.

At the table, the white-haired man kept silent. The wife was a sparkling conversationalist, and the Doctor enjoyed her talk

as much as he did the meal. Mrs. Peterson had been to places and had seen many things, and she had a way of telling about them that was even more vivid than the average travelogue. She appeared to be interested in everything.

"Here is a woman of culture," thought Overfield. "This woman knows a little bit about everything and is able to tell it at the right time."

He might have added that she was beautiful. Subconsciously, he felt that; and even more deeply wondered why such a woman should have married a fossil like Peterson. Nice enough man, all right, but certainly no fit mate for such a woman.

The woman was small, delicately formed, yet radiant with health and vitality. Someone was sick in the family, but it evidently was not she. Dr. Overfield studied the husband. Perhaps there was his patient? Silent, moody, suspicious, locked doors and barred windows! It might be a case of paranoia, and the wife was forcing the conversation and trying to be gay simply as a defence reaction.

Was she really happy? At times, a cloud seemed to come over her face, to be chased away at once by a smile or even a merry laugh. At least, she was not altogether happy. How could one be with a husband like that?

The surly, silent servant waited on the table. He seemed to anticipate every need of his mistress. His service was beyond the shadow of reproach; but in some way, for some reason, the Doctor disliked him from the beginning. He tried to analyze that dislike, but failed. Later on he found the reason. His mind was working fast, trying to solve the problem of his being there, the invitation to spend a week. Suddenly, he awoke to the fact that there was a vacant chair. The table had been set for four, and just then the door opened and in walked a young lad followed by a burly man in black.

"This is my son, Alexander, Dr. Overfield. Shake hands with the gentleman, Alexander."

CLOSELY followed by the man in black, the youth walked around the table, took the Doctor's hand, and then sat down at the empty place. An ice was served. The man in black stood in back of the chair and carefully supervised every movement the boy made. Conversation was now blocked. The dessert was eaten in silence. Finished, Peterson spoke.

"You can take Alexander to his room, Yorry."

"Very well, Mr. Peterson."

Again there were but three at the table, but the conversation was not resumed. Cigarettes were smoked in silence.

Then Mrs. Peterson excused herself.

"I am designing a new dress, and I have gotten to a very interesting place. I cannot decide on snaps or buttons; and if there must be an originality about them that will make their use logical. So, I shall have to ask you gentlemen to excuse me. I hope that you will spend a comfortable week with us, Dr. Overfield."

"I am sure of that, Mrs. Peterson," replied the Doctor, rising as she left the table. The white-haired man did not rise. He simply kept looking into the wall ahead of him, looking into it without seeing the picture on it — without seeing anything that there was to see! At last, he crushed the fire out of his cigarette and rose.

"Let us go into the library. I want to talk."

ONCE THERE, he tried to make the Doctor comfortable.

"Take off your coat and collar if you wish, and put your feet up on the stool. We shall be alone tonight, and there is no need of formality."

"I judge you are not very happy, Mr. Peterson?" the Doctor began. It was just an opening wedge to the mental catharsis that he hoped would follow. In fact, it was a favorite introduction of his to the examination of a patient. It gave the sick person confidence in the

Doctor, a feeling that he understood something about him, personally. And many people came to his office because they were not happy.

"Not very," was the reply. "I am going to tell you something about it, but part I want you to see for yourself. It starts back at the time when I began in business. I had been called Philip by my parents, Philip Peterson. When in school, I studied about Philip of Macedonia, and there were parts of his life that I rather admired. He was a road breaker, if you know what I mean. He took a lot of countries and consolidated them. He reorganized the army. Speaking in modern slang, he was a 'go-getter'. Of course, he had his weaknesses — such as wine and women — but in the main, he was rather fine.

"There was a difference between being King of Macedonia and becoming president of a leather company, but I thought that the same principles might be used and would probably lead to success. At any rate, I studied the life of Philip and tried to profit by it. At last, I became a rich man.

"Then I married. As you saw, my wife is a gifted, cultured woman. We had a son. At his birth, I named him Alexander. I wanted to follow in the course of Macedonian. I ruled the leather business in America, and I hoped that he would rule it

in the entire world. You saw the boy tonight at supper."

"Yes, I saw him."

"And your diagnosis?"

"Not exactly true to form, but resembles the type of mental deficiency known as mongolian idiocy, more than anything else."

"That is what I have been told. We kept him at home for two years, and then I placed him in one of the best private schools in America. When he reached the age of ten, they refused to keep him any longer, no matter what I paid them. So I fixed this place up, sold out my interests, and came here to live. He is my son, and I feel that I should care for him."

"It is rather peculiar that they do not want him in a private school. With your wealth . . ."

"Something happened. They felt that they could not take the responsibility for his care."

"How does he act? What does his mother think about it?"

"Do you know much about mothers in general?"

"A little."

"Then you can understand. His mother thinks that he is perfect. At times, she refuses to believe that he is feeble-minded. She uses the word 'retarded' and thinks that he will outgrow the condition and some day, become normal."

"She is mistaken."

"I am afraid so. But I cannot convince her. When the matter is argued, she becomes angry;

and she is very unpleasant when she is that way. We moved here. You saw our servants. The butler serves in several capacities. He has been in the family for many years and is to be trusted. He is deaf-mute."

"I understand," the Doctor exclaimed. "That accounts for his surly, silent personality. All mutes are queer."

"I presume that is true. He keeps house for us. You see, other servants are hard to keep. They come, but they won't stay after they learn about Alexander."

"Do they object to his mentality?"

"No, it is the way he acts that worries them. I have given you the facts. They will not stay here. The man, Yorry, is an ex-pugilist. He is without nerves and without fear. He is very good to the boy; but, at the same time, he makes him obey. Since he has been here, it is possible to bring the lad to the table, and that makes Mother very happy. But, of course, he cannot be on duty all the time. When he has his hours off, he lets Alexander run in the park."

"The boy must like it out there. I saw the deer and the rabbits."

"Yes, it gives him exercise. He likes to chase them."

"Don't you think he ought to have some playmates?"

"I used to think so. I even

went so far as to adopt another boy. He died. After that, I could not repeat the experiment."

"But any child might die," the Doctor replied. "Why not bring another boy in, even for a few hours a day, for him to talk to and play with?"

"No, never again! But you stay here and watch the boy. Examine him and see if you can give me advice."

"I am afraid that there is not much to be done for him beyond training him, and correcting any bad habits that he may have."

THE WHITE-HAIRED man looked puzzled as he replied:

"That is the trouble. Some years ago, I consulted a specialist. I told him all about it, and he said that he thought the child had better be allowed freedom of action. He said something about desires and libido and thought that the only chance for improvement was in letting him have his own way. That is one reason why we are here with the deer and the rabbits."

"You mean that the boy likes to play with them?"

"Not exactly. But you study him. I have told Yorry that he is to answer all your questions. He knows the boy better than I do; and God forgive me for saying it, but I know him well. Of course, it is hard for me to talk about it. I would rather have you get the details from

Yorry. It is growing late and perhaps you had better go to bed. Be sure to lock the door."

"I'll do that," the Doctor said, "But you told me that nothing would be stolen."

"No. Nothing will be stolen."

THE Doctor went to his room, thoroughly puzzled. He knew the variety of mental deficiency known as *mongolian idiocy*. He had helped examine and care for several hundred of such cases. Young Alexander was one, yet, he was different. There was something about him that did not quite harmonize with that diagnosis. His habits? Perhaps that was it. Was his father afraid of him? Was that why he had a strong man to train him? Was that why the bars were on the windows? But why the rabbits and the little deer?

Almost before he was asleep he was roused by a knock at the door. Going to it, he called without opening the door. "What is it?"

"This is Yorry," was the response. "Are you all right?"

"Yes."

"Let me in."

The Doctor opened the door, allowed the man to enter, and locked it behind him.

"What is the trouble?"

"Alexander is out of his room. We do not mind in the daytime, but at night it is bad. Look over at the window!"

There was a white thing at one of the windows, holding on to the bars and shaking them in an effort to break them. Yorry shook his head.

"That lad, that lad! This is no place for him, but what are the poor people to do? Well, if you are safe, I will go out and try to get him. You lock the door behind me."

"Are you afraid of him?"

"Not for myself, but for others. I do not know fear. Mr. Peterson said you wanted to examine the boy. What time tomorrow?"

"At ten. Right here will do."

"I'll have him here. Good night, and be sure to lock the door."

THE DOCTOR was tired, so he went to sleep with all the questions unsolved. The next morning breakfast was served to him in his room by the deaf-mute. At ten, Yorry came in with Alexander. The boy seemed frightened, but obeyed the commands of his attendant.

In most respects, the examination showed the physical defects of the *mongolian idiot*. There were a few minor differences. Though the boy was small for his age, the musculature was good, and the teeth were perfect. Not a cavity was present. The upper canines were unusual.

"He has very fine teeth, Yorry," the Doctor commented.

"He has, Sir, and he uses them," replied the man.

"You mean in eating his food?"

"Yes. Just that."

"They are the teeth of a meat-eater."

"That is what he is."

"I wish that you would tell me about it, honestly. Why did they turn him out of that private school?"

"It was his habits."

"What kind of habits?"

"Suppose you see for yourself. The three of us will go out in the woods. It is safe as long as you are with me, but you must not go by yourself."

The Doctor laughed. "I am accustomed to abnormals."

"Perhaps, but I do not want anything to happen to you. Come with me, Alexander."

The boy went with them, and seemed to be perfectly docile.

Once in the woods, Yorry helped the boy undress. Naked, the lad started to run through the forest.

"He cannot get out?" the Doctor asked.

"No, nor for that matter, neither can the deer and the little rabbits. We will not try to follow him. When he finishes, he will come back."

An hour passed, and then two hours. At last, Alexander came creeping through the grass on all fours. Yorry took a wet towel from his pocket, wiped the blood from the boy's

face and hands, and then started to dress him.

"So that is what he does?" asked the Doctor.

"Yes, and sometimes more than that."

"And that is why they did not want him in the school?"

"I suppose so. His father told me that when he was young, he started in with flies and bugs and toads."

The Doctor thought fast.

"There was a little child brought here to be his playmate. The boy died. Do you know anything about that?"

"No. I do not know anything about that. I do not want to know anything about it. It probably happened before I came here."

OVERFIELD KNEW that the man was not telling the truth. But even in his lies, he was handing out useful information. The Doctor decided to have another talk with the boy's father. There was no use trying to help unless all the facts were given to him.

At the noonday meal, the conversation was not as sparkling as it had been the evening before. Peterson seemed moody. Mrs. Peterson was polite, but decidedly restrained. It seemed that most of the conversation was forced. After the meal was over, there was one part of the conversation that

seemed to stand out in the mind of the specialist. Peterson remarked that one of his teeth was troubling him, and that he would have to see a dentist. His wife replied, "I have perfect teeth. I have never been to a dentist."

IN THE library, while he was waiting for Peterson to come, Dr. Overfield recalled that statement.

"I have examined your son, Mr. Peterson," began the specialist, "and I have seen him in the woods. Yorry told me about some things and lied to me about others. Up to the present time, no one seems willing to tell me the entire truth. I have one question that I must have answered. How did the boy die? The one you had for a playmate?"

"I am not sure. And when I say that, I am perfectly honest. We found him dead in his room one morning. A glass had been broken in the bedroom window. A lot of broken glass was around him. There was a deep cut in one side of his throat. The Coroner thought that he had walked in his sleep, struck the window pane, and that a piece of glass had severed the jugular vein. He certified that as the cause of death."

"What do you think, Mr. Peterson?"

"I have stopped thinking."

"Was it before that, or after-

wards, that you had the bars placed in the windows?"

"After that. Can you help the boy?"

"I am afraid not. The advice that the other man gave you years ago was bad. It has kept the boy in fine physical condition, but there are other things to be considered besides physical health. If he were my son, I would remove the deer and the rabbits, those that are still alive. And I would try and train him in different habits."

"I will think that over. I paid you for your opinion, and I value it. Now, one more question: Is this habit of the boy's a hereditary one? Do you think, that in the past, some ancestor of his did something like that?"

It was a puzzling question. Perhaps Dr. Overfield was right in answering it with another question.

"Any insanity in the family?"

"None that I ever heard of."

"Good! How about your wife's family?"

"Her heredity is as good as mine, perhaps better."

"Then all that we can say is that mongolianism can come in any family; and, as far as the boy's habit is concerned, suppose we call it an atavism? At one time, all our ancestors ate raw meat. The Mongolian type of mental deficiency comes to us from the cradle of the human race. The boy may have brought it with him as he leaped for-

ward two million years, brought raw meat-eating with his slanting eyebrows."

"I wish I were sure," commented the father. "I would give anything to be sure that I was not to blame for the boy's condition."

"Or your wife?" the Doctor asked.

"Oh! There is no question about her," was the half smiling reply. "She is one of the nicest women God ever made."

"Perhaps there is something in her subconscious, something that does not show on the surface?"

The husband shook his head.

"No. She is just good through and through."

THIS ENDED the conversation. The Doctor promised to spend the rest of the week, though he felt that there was little use in his doing so. He joined the retired leather man and his wife at dinner. Mrs. Peterson was more beautiful than ever, in a white evening dress, trimmed with gold sequins. Peterson looked tired; but his wife was brilliant in every way, in addition to her costume. She talked as though she would never tire, and everything that she said was worth listening to. She had just aided in the organization of a milk fund for undernourished children. Charity, it seemed, was one

of her hobbies. Peterson talked about heredity, but little attention was paid to him or his thoughts. He soon stopped talking.

Through it all there was something that Dr. Overfield could not understand. When he said good night to the white-haired man, he told him as much.

"I do not understand it either," commented Peterson, "but perhaps, before I die, I shall understand. I cannot help feeling that there is something in heredity, but I cannot prove it."

Dr. Overfield locked the door of his bedroom, and retired at once. He was sleepy, and, at the same time, nervous. He thought that a long night's rest would help. But he did not sleep long. A pounding on the door brought him to consciousness.

"Who is there?" he asked.

"It's me, Yorry. Open the door!"

"What is the trouble?"

"It is the boy, Alexander. He has slipped away from me again, and I cannot find him."

"Perhaps he has gone to the woods."

"No. All the outside doors are locked. He must be in the house."

"Have you hunted?"

"Everywhere. The butler is safe in his room. I have been all over the house except in the Master's room."

"Why not go there? Wait till I get some clothes on. Just a

minute. He keeps the doors locked?"

"It was locked earlier in the evening. I tested it. I do that every night with all the bedrooms."

"Anyone with duplicate keys?"

"No one except Mrs. Peterson. I think she must have a set; but she sleeps in her room, and her door was locked. At least it was, earlier in the evening."

"I think we ought to go to their rooms. The boy has to be somewhere. Perhaps he is with one of his parents."

"If he is with his mother, it is all right. They understand each other. She can do anything with him."

They rushed upstairs. The door to Mrs. Peterson's room was open, the room empty, and the bed untouched. That was something not to be expected. The door to the next room, Peterson's room, was closed — but not locked. Opening it, Yorry turned on the electric lights.

Before he did so, from the dark room came an odd, low, snarling noise. Then the lights were on, and there was the Peterson family on the floor. Peterson was in the middle. He had his shirt torn off, and he was very quiet. On the right side, tearing at the muscles of the arm, was Alexander, his face and hands smeared with blood. On the other side, at the neck, the Peterson woman was fast-

ened, drinking blood from the jugular vein. Her face and dress were stained with blood, and as she looked up, her face was taut of an irritated, but otherwise contented demon. She seemed disturbed over the interruption, but too preoccupied to understand it. She kept on drinking, but the boy snarled his anger. Overfield pulled Yorry through the doorway, turned out the lights, and slammed the door in back of them. Then he dragged the dazed man down the steps to the first floor.

"Where is the telephone?" he yelled.

YORRY finally showed him. The Doctor jerked off the receiver.

"Hullo! Hullo! Central. Give me the Coroner. No, I don't know the number. Why should I know the number? Get him for me. Hullo! Is this the Coroner? Can you hear me? This is a doctor talking. Dr. Overfield. Come to Philip Peterson's house at once. There has been a murder committed here. Yes. The man is dead. What killed him? Heredity. You can't understand? Why should you? Now, listen to me. He had his throat cut, perhaps with a piece of broken glass, perhaps not. Can you understand that? Do you remember the little boy? Come up, and I will wait for you here."

The Doctor hung up the re-

ceiver. Yorry was looking at him.

"The master was always wor-

ried about the boy," Yorry said.

"He can stop worrying now," answered the Doctor.

The Reckoning

The November issue of MOH was one wherein your ballots kept the order of stories shifting rapidly, and we have given a brief account of the first-place race on page 123. No less fascinating was the see-sawing amongst the three stories that finally wound up in 2nd, 3rd and 4th place; nor did the story that came out at the bottom spend the entire voting period in the cellar, either.

Here is how your votes finally rated them:

(1) *The Devil's Pool*, by Greye La Spina; (2) *Rattle of Bones*, by Robert E. Howard; (3) *Call of the Mech-Men*, by Laurence Manning; (4) a tie between *Under the Haw Tree*, by Katherine Yates, and *Was It A Dream?*, by Guy de Maupassant; (5) *A Psychological Shipwreck*, by Ambrose Bierce; (6) *The Empty Zoo*, by Edward D. Hoch; (7) *The Head of Du Bois*, by Dorothy Norman Cooke.



In the Winter issue, the winning story went into first place on the third ballot we received, and was never displaced or tied thereafter. Contention amongst the other tales remained lively to the end. Here is how they came out finally:

(1) *The Black Beast*, by Henry S. Whitehead; (2) *The Faceless God*, by Robert Bloch; (3) *The Abyss*, by RAWL; (4) *Dr. Muncing, Exorcist*, by Gordon MacCreagh; (5) *Master Nicholas*, by Seabury Quinn; (6) *The Affair at 7 Rue de M—*, by John Steinbeck; (7) *The Man in the Dark*, by Irwin Ross; (8) *But Not the Herald*, by Roger Zelazny. No story in either of these two issues received a large enough number of extreme reactions, for and against, (in proportion to votes received) to be called controversial.

Dwelling Of The Righteous

by Anna Hunger

(author of *Beyond the Breakers*)

Was it coincidence that this monkey seemed to appear out of nowhere and attach itself to him, a monkey that looked like the one which had similarly been connected with a self-righteous hypocrite of an ancestor? He didn't know . . . couldn't be sure . . . but this monkey answered to the same name.

HE STOOD staring out of the window in the big, old-fashioned frame house, across the narrow strip of garden that divided it from the small, neat house next door. In the dusk the only light came from a

single window; in the window was a small, dark monkey — old and bearded. His paws were pressed against the glass of his window as he stared directly back at the man in the other house. For a full min-

ute both remained motionless.

A woman's full, hearty voice called, "Chester Paxton, there you go again! Can't you eat your dinner without jumping up to look over at Micaiah?"

Chester Paxton's tall, rather gawky figure moved to the round maple table and seated itself while Lilac Rand clattered plates of dessert and coffee cups onto the table. She was a careless person, he mused — but kindly and warm-hearted; one must make allowances. It did seem that recently, however, she had grown noisier and more untidy than when he first knew her.

Dropping a kiss on the top of his head, Lilac sat down and attacked her pie with vigor. At fifty, her figure was running to fat but she never stinted herself of her own rich cooking. She took a long drink of the wine in her glass and wiped the drops from her mouth.

"Very tasty pie, my dear," he said in his very dry, quiet tones and wondered if Micaiah would eat pie. He glanced over his shoulder toward the window.

"Now, Chester," came the warning.

"Seems too bad to let the poor little fellow stay there by himself."

"Ever since he turned up, you've acted like he was your

brother." Her hearty laugh boomed out.

"I'm away all day at the shop and he's alone outside."

"On a fine long chain so he can move all around."

"If . . ." he asked pleadingly in the rusty voice, "if I could bring him with me when I come over to see you . . .?"

"I'm sorry, but you know how mischievous he is — poking into everything, throwing things on the floor." Lilac reached over and squeezed Chester's hand. "We can't let a monkey come between us, dear. Not when we're planning our marriage." Her fleshy face was kind, but the mouth was set firmly.

He looked at the front of her blue cotton dress, where there was a soupstain. "But after we're married and my house is sold, where can Micaiah go?"

"There's animal sanctuaries, and zoos, and . . ."

"And what?"

"We'll find a wonderful place for him. Now sweetheart, you know I want to make you happy in every possible way. We'll have a ball together!" Lilac resumed marriage plans, gesturing enthusiastically and refilling her wine glass from time to time.

Had she always drunk so much? he wondered. For a year since she had moved into the old house, he had thought of asking her to marry him.

He had adored his mother with whom he lived but she had been ill for so long. Lilac, jolly, motherly, was so full of life — and he had lived beside death for many years. Lilac with her fun, her little gifts of food and flowers brought to the woman who grew weaker, smaller, shrunken, decaying slowly before his very eyes.

But Lilac had changed; he really could not approve of the wine. Often she drank a cocktail before dinner, too, and would even coax him to dance to the record player. At his age and hers! It was not seemly. "Did I tell you just how Micajah came to me?" Chester remembered it all again, his mind moving through influences and incidents like tired eyes tracing too-familiar wallpaper.

...
THAT NIGHT he had been in the bedroom where his mother had died a week before, making neat stack of her personal belongings and papers. Silence and sorrow lay like a cloud over him. Outside, the berries of the pepper tree pattered slowly to the ground whenever a branch scraped against the house in the fragile night breeze. That wall of his life that had once been built solidly round his ailing mother's needs now enclosed only a vacuum. His boss, Mr. Jordan, had said, "You'll be freer

now; things will change for you — new friends, and all." But Chester could not imagine moving away from the neighborhood and seeking new people. Lilac, for instance, lived next door.

What should he do with his new freedom? His character was not the stuff of which adventurers were made. He lacked the tight-lipped stubbornness that made his mother fight pain, that made her fight against death even as she suffered. What a great strong will she had — if only he could measure up to half of it!

Chester's short laugh was husky and a little bitter. He would need to "borrow" someone else's character, for his own would never do. Someone strong and positive and confident. He sighed and looked down, blinking at the page of fine copper-script handwriting on yellowed, crackling paper. His eyes were swollen with tears as he read the letter from an early ancestor to his young niece, Matilda. They were strong men, those pioneers.

Suddenly, the room seemed dim to him and he rubbed his eyes and stared about. He had been working too hard and grieving over his loss, he decided, and had strained his eyes . . . A mist was slowly swirling through the room, light and silvery. Then he

shook his head to clear it and looked at the papers he held. There was a small faded photograph of Eben Thatcher, writer of the letter, town councilman and judge of Salem.

My dear Matilda: My Fondest Wishes go to you in your isolated Western World far from the wickedness of this town of Salem. Let us Devoutly Pray that in your Life you will never know the Evil of Human Beings who shame the Devil. Ah, Lucifer is among us here these days!

The letter told in stern sentences of heresy and witchcraft in Salem. It prophesied hell-fire and damnation for these wicked souls. Eben Thatcher had been testing women he suspected of witchcraft by boiling their blood, to see if any familiar — such as a cat or a toad — would enter the room. He had them bound and threw them into the river. If the women floated, they were guilty; water would not receive them.

Breathing down from the old days when witch-hunting was rampant the fiery, righteous thunder of old Ben Thatcher sounded in Chester's ears. Again the lights in the room dimmed — then flared up once more, and he read the final lines:

A few weeks ago, just before the witchcraft Trials my old friend Captain Jordan brought me a monkey. I did not really want him but he seems a Friendly Creature

... I have named him Micajah ...

CHESTER glanced up from the letter — and gasped! Crouched in the open bedroom doorway was a small, brown monkey, grinning widely, jerking his head to right and left curiously. "How . . . What . . .!" Chester jumped up and the monkey scampered to the dresser and leapt onto the top.

"I won't hurt you," muttered Chester bewilderedly. "How on earth did you get in?" He hurried out of the bedroom, through the small combination living and dining room, to find the front door slightly ajar. But he was certain that he had closed and bolted it for the night.

He returned to find the monkey pawing at the old letter he had been reading. The photo of Eben Thatcher lay face up; the long face with its sideburns and chin whiskers, dark with age, was a replica of the small animal face now staring at it. Chester's limbs were drained of strength, limp and weak, and a band of ice tightened round his heart as he sank into a chair. What was the matter with him? But the monkey jumped on his knee, chattering confidently. For a moment words would not release from Chester's tight throat. "I — I must find your owner," he gasped at last.

Bright sparks shot from the

little eyes and the monkey swarmed up his arm and nuzzled his ear. "Friendly, eh? What shall I call you for the time being? Micajah?"

The eyes in the small head pressed affectionately against his own, were shining with an eery light which Chester did not see.

IN THE famous "House of Pride", a large shop dealing in fine antique furniture and objects d'art, Chester was book-keeper and head shop assistant. One morning, shortly after Jordan, the owner, had come into his office a woman customer, mink coat carelessly thrown over her shoulders, appeared. "Good morning, Mrs. Evanston," Chester greeted her. "What may I do for you today?"

He began showing her many things, for she had just built a new home. She had poor taste, he thought, and was a frivolous, extravagant woman. "It would be all wrong to put a Ming lamp next to the Empire velvet settee."

"Oh, really?" she queried, frowning.

"And you tell me the light will come from large glass doors on the south side of the room? No, I'm sorry, but if you use what you've selected, that room will be ruined."

When she had left, Jordan called Chester into the office

and his round, usually-pleasant face was grim. "What's come over you lately, Chester? We're here to sell to the customers — not to lecture them!"

"The woman has no sense of true values. She must be instructed."

"We aren't here to judge our customers' characters."

Protesting, Chester shook his head. "People should learn right from wrong in everything they . . ."

"Don't let it happen again," Jordan said curtly and turned back to his papers.

Outside the glass front of the House of Pride there was a curious jingling as the very long chain attached to Micajah's collar went slowly snaking along the sidewalk and the bearded monkey, with the sly grin of an old man, turned back toward Chester's house, a few blocks away in the residential district.

CHESTER AND LILAC sat side-by-side on the old, over-stuffed chesterfield with the stains she said she could not remove and the frayed edges she could not mend. He was smoking his after-dinner pipe and her head lay on his shoulder. All was peaceful while they talked of their coming marriage. But, studying the room Chester knew that the clutter of junk in it must be

removed and the place made elegantly austere.

Lazily Lilac blew at a strand of graying blonde hair that fell over her eye. "Georgia Ames will lend us her punch bowl for the wedding reception."

"We need no favors from her."

"She's my friend!" Lilac indignantly sat bolt upright.

"We've both seen that man drive up every Friday night and leave his car parked there over Sunday. A disgrace to the neighborhood." Chester's mouth closed tightly over the pipe-stem in a rigid line.

"Who are you to judge everybody? Georgia has worked hard all her life and had many disappointments. She's entitled to some affection and love . . ."

"She is not entitled to become a scarlet woman."

Lilac's placid face scowled at him. "You build some little thing into a mountain of evil, Chester. You never used to do that."

A strange pattering noise came from somewhere in the house, then a scraping and a light clatter. They looked about but could see nothing unusual. Then Micajah scampered in and stopped before them, head cocked on one side, small jaws chattering as he scratched under one arm.

Lilac laughed. "He's slipped his leash again."

"But he was inside, and I

know I closed the doors and windows," Chester's slow, rusty voice drawled in puzzlement.

Lilac was holding out a cookie. Micajah seized it, gobbled it down and immediately jumped into her lap and climbed over her to get at the cookie jar on the end table. "No, Micajah," she admonished, smiling.

The monkey turned on her and plunged his small hairy arms into her hair; his paws held fast and he pulled hard. "Stop — stop it!" she cried, trying to push him away. The paws tangled in her hair, tugging, tugging. Sharp pains jabbed her head. "Chester, help me!"

"Come, Micajah — that's no way to behave." Chuckling, Chester bent over Lilac and the fierce little wild creature. The paws clung fast with demon determination, and Lilac's eyes were wide with terror, her mouth frozen in a scream of torment that was soundless.

At Chester's touch, the monkey grew quiet and allowed his master to pick him up.

"Take him out of here," said Lilac in a deadly calm tone. "Now."

CHESTER TOOK Micajah over to his own house, and brought him some food. He went around checking doors and windows; they were closed.

Suddenly, the house was shaken by a violent wind — creaking as of a great pillar or the mast of a ship sounded loudly, rhythmically repeating in the wind. Where was such a pillar? he wondered. No nearby house had one, and the only tree was the slender trunked pepper tree. Now the room was growing dim and he went into the living room. The same dimness, as of a fog creeping inch by inch into the house was there and a smell of smoke in the air. "Wind must be from the sea; from the West," he muttered aloud. "But the smoke . . ." As he looked out the window into the night, the groaning of a mast sounded once more.

Outside the night was crystal clear.

Chester returned to Lilac's and was going up the steps when the front door opened and Lilac, a finger to her lips, came out. "Bert, my brother, just arrived — without warning as usual. Please don't mention anything about our marriage!"

"But you said Bert was in Japan!"

"The last I knew he was. Bert roams all over the world and hardly ever writes a letter. Look, honey, he can be difficult, so please do as I ask."

In the living room, Bert Rand, a short, frail but wiry man with protruding bright blue eyes,

about seventy, greeted Chester shortly, then lay down on the old sofa and put up his feet. "Have a snort." He motioned at the bottle of whiskey that stood on the end table and drank deeply from his own glass.

"Not for me, thanks." Chester smiled politely and glanced at the two large suitcases covered with foreign labels. One had been opened. He brought the liquor with him, thought Chester. At least Lilac does not keep strong spirits in the house.

"Not a drinking man, eh? Well, we all have our faults!" A burst of raucous laughter, in which Lilac joined, shook the room, seeming to echo from wall to wall, piercing Chester's ears like steel drills, deafening him. Lilac with her mouth wide open, head thrown back, seemed suddenly to become a coarse, frowsy fishwife, Bert a senile satyr, leering from his couch. When they grew quieter Chester remarked, "It must be very interesting, traveling about as you do, Mr. Rand."

"Been on the go ever since I retired from business. Had lots of good times in every sonofabitchin' country in the world. Lilac, how's about dinner?"

While she was in the kitchen Bert told of his experiences in brothels from San Francisco to Singapore. Chester's spine grew stiffer; his fingers locked to-

gether tightly in his lap as he listened.

When Lilac brought the tray of thick meat sandwiches, pie, and coffee, Bert began eating, choking down great bites, spitting out pieces of gristle. He asked Chester, "What the hell's your racket?"

Chester described his work and Bert gave a contemptuous snort. "Jeez! That's for women." His sharp eyes scraped Chester up and down. "You're no kid — but you're not so goddam old, either. Fortyish, I'd say. Ought to be selling or building construction or . . ."

"I much prefer my present employment. It is dignified."

There was complete silence. Bert poured himself a strong drink. "Lilac, you know it's sure good to see you again."

"It's been nine years," she smiled.

"And am I fed up with God-damned hotels and hotel cooking and the whole sonofabitchin' routine." Bert gazed around with keen eyes. "Think I'll stay a while."

When Chester left, he motioned for Lilac to join him. Outside the door, on the porch he said firmly, "Lilac, we'll have to tell him about our getting married. He's going to settle down here."

"Oh, no — he won't. He may go on to San Francisco where he stays with our niece. She handles his business corres-

pondence whenever it piles up."

"As your future husband, I intend to inform Bert . . ."

Her fingers covered his mouth and she pressed close against his side, whispering. "Dear, I love Bert although he's a little rough and has a quick temper. But his money will come to me when he dies. I've spent a lot of mine having fun and I don't regret it." She laughed. "Now I'm going to cut expenses — you'll see! Together we can live well."

He kissed her cheek. "After Bert leaves." As he went down the steps Chester's mouth set in hard lines. Bert was an evil influence on his sister. All that drinking, that cursing. Blaspheming. Bert's life in the vilest dens of iniquity he could find. "Bert Rand is a Godless man," Chester told the night, each word dropping like a seed of doom into the earth.

WITH LILAC BUSY cooking for Bert, waiting on him and entertaining him, Micajah became Chester's constant companion. Each morning, Micajah chattered at him from the other side of the breakfast table; each night they dined together. Sometimes Chester brought home a big bag of the kind of nuts the monkey liked best, and over a book and a pipe he would munch nuts along with Micajah through the evening.

At night Micajah slept at the foot of the bed.

After another dinner at Lilac's, punctuated by Bert's derision of Chester's ideas and beliefs, Chester talked with his future wife on the porch once more. "We can't go on like this."

"Just a little while longer." Her soft brown eyes gazed at him pleadingly.

"You're afraid to tell Bert about us because he won't approve and you won't inherit his money. You're greedy. Greed is a sin!"

Furious, Lilac went in and slammed the door without another word. Chester's eyes closed for a moment and he summoned patience; those who were morally strong like himself must guide the weak into proper paths. Bert had first influenced his sister in bad habits, then had come between her and her fiancé in this wicked manner.

When Lilac returned to the living room, Bert said, "What in hell are you making eyes at that weirdo next door for?"

"He's nice. A companion for a woman who's alone."

"You'd do better in a wax museum." Blue sparks shot at her from his eyes. "He knows you'll get my money after I'm gone — that's what. The sonof-a-bitch wants to marry you and live easy."

"Chester's a kind man, and we're both alone . . ."

"I don't care what you do so long as you don't make it legal. You're soft-headed and soft-hearted."

"That reminds me," she said sharply. "I want you to put that roll of five hundred dollar bills you carry around into the bank tomorrow. For so long as you stay here — no matter how short a time it is."

He grinned teasingly. "It won't be short, sweetie."

Sometimes Chester experienced fierce burning pains in his head, which he attributed to strain and uncertainty due to the presence of Bert Rand and his interference with his plans. Sometimes he felt unusually exhilarated and it was on a Saturday morning when, going outdoors after breakfast, Chester suddenly leapt up and with one arm grabbed the branch of the pepper tree high over his head. His lanky body swung to and for a moment, easily, gracefully. Then he heard a wild screeching from the direction of Lilac's garden; he heard a thumping sound and a man's voice roaring with laughter.

Dropping to the ground Chester ran to the fence and through the gate. A short distance away, Bert, in dirty slacks, shirt and slippers, was tormenting Micajah. He held a red hot poker with a piece

of meat stuck on it and each time the monkey tried to seize the food, his paw was burnt. Bert kept poking the tempting meat at him, waving it around, jerking it away.

Rage swept over Chester as he charged down upon the little man, shouting, "Stop that! Stop at once!" Micajah, lips drawn back over his teeth in a snarl, turned and fled on three feet, holding up the burnt paw.

"If you were bigger, I'd knock you down!" Chester's eyes blazed.

"Only having a little fun. Thought monkeys were supposed to be smart. *He* isn't."

NOW, TRYING to find Micajah, Chester became frantic; he called and searched the brush, the branches of trees and went to the neighbors with anxious queries. No one had seen the monkey. The loud motor of a big trash truck could be heard making its stops a block away. Chester stared in horror. Could Micajah, in panic and pain, have gotten into the trash truck without the men seeing him?

Running down the street, he told the driver and his helper about the lost monkey.

"I'd have seen him. Nothing goes in here I don't see." The man picked up a very large old chair left out on the side-

walk and heaved it into the truck.

"I didn't know you took such large pieces of furniture," Chester said slowly, his eyes on the huge, heavy piece of steel, which was as long as the width of the truck and four feet wide. This steel, made heavier by the power of the machinery operating it, rose, circled over the trash to the very edge of the back of the truck, then pulled back the trash, packing it tightly in the truck body. Again the steel rose, poised, hovering, until the next load was in. It did not cut, but scraped evenly along an inch above the truck floor. How odd it is, Chester thought, that I have seen these trucks going about every day and never examined one before. These great gray beetles going slowly about the city.

However, no matter how hard he searched for the monkey, Micajah seemed to have vanished completely.

ON A SUNNY Saturday a few days later, Lilac returned from an overnight visit to a friend's and found the trash truck in front of her house. Chester was helping lift the huge old overstuffed sofa into the back. "Chester!" she cried. "What are you doing?"

The sofa was in the back and the big blade was lifting. "We talked about getting a new

sofa from the shop when we're married," he said, turning with a smile. "I can get that Empire settee at a discount, you know."

"But I was fond of the old sofa." Her goodnatured face showed with amazement and anger. "Besides, I have a friend who'd be glad to have that sofa. He can re-upholster."

The steel was at the top of its circle and descending. The truck man looked from Chester to Lilac. "Well?"

"I'm sorry, Lilac. It's best this way."

"Bert loves that old sofa."

The steel was lowering and the truck man shrugged and went to the front and climbed into the cab with the driver. Slowly, the great dirty blade pulled back the sofa into the body of the truck with the rest of the trash as the truck moved on up the street. Chester put his hand on her shoulder. "Bert won't mind. He's gone, now."

"Gone?"

"Bert wanted me to tell you goodbye. He left last night and said he would write you in a few weeks."

"Was he mad about anything?"

"No . . . no."

Pulling off the small black pillbox perched on her head Lilac went up the steps of the porch with Chester. "You talked me into staying overnight with Lee and Dorothy. Said I'd been doing nothing

but wait on Bert since he came." The plump face jerked towards his. "I'll bet you did it so you could get rid of that sofa!"

"Now, now, Lilac, dear, when you think it over . . ." he soothed as they started into the house. Then Chester pressed a hand over his eyes; the door, the world whirled round him in a spasm of dizziness. Lilac, still protesting, went inside.

Chester fought the terrible waves of dizziness in which he was plunged, as in a different time level. Voices pleading, crying, begging in torment deafened his ears and there was a sound of running water he could not understand and a faint roaring of fire. "Lay not in wait, oh wicked man against the dwelling of the righteous; spoil not his resting place!" Bert, the wicked man, spoiling his rest.

Above Chester's head, crouched on the overhang of the porch, was a small, grinning figure, jumping up and down with glee . . .

And the great gray beetle, along with hundreds of other beetles was slowly moving toward a great city dump in the Valley at dusk. It halted at the gate momentarily, above the incline leading down to the level lip that circled the pit. Here in the rose-mauve dusk, in the clouds of dust other

trucks, vans, cars with small rent trailers were backing up to the edge of the pit. Loads were flung over consisting of every imaginable kind of trash. Men shouted — but no one could hear them over the roaring of the bulldozers and other engines. And they waved their arms, guiding cars and trucks to spaces along the pit rim.

The beetle moved down the slope and backed into position. Chunks of earth were being torn out of the sides of the pit, widening it, and the earth dumped on top of the trash for fill. A lever was pressed on the great beetle and the body rose and reversed, dropping its load into the smokey pit far below among the other loads and the dirt fill, sending up clouds of dust.

A WEEK LATER Chester was gazing around Lilac's comfortable house and thinking that all the wickedness had been purged from the place. Lilac was kind and affectionate to him, as he was to her in their wedded life. And he and his spouse walked in the path of righteousness.

Sometimes he looked at the *For Sale* sign on his house next door and felt such a tremendous force drawing him there that he would go over and walk through the empty rooms; and it seemed as if part of

himself were gone. The house did not shake, nor grow dim, nor did the creaking of the great mast sound again. Only silence . . . Chester ducked his head low and with both hands scratched behind his ears vigorously.

On the day that the stranger came into the house, he spoke gravely and with consideration to Lilac. But Chester saw instant alarm stamp her face and she leapt from the beautiful Empire settee he had bought as a wedding gift.

Chester politely waved the man named Randall to the Empire settee. He liked the man, who was quiet and businesslike. But Lilac was chattering shrill questions.

"What could have happened? Bert hasn't written — but that's his way."

"We don't know that anything has happened, Mrs. Paxton. But Miss Wheeler, your niece in San Francisco, became worried and contacted the Missing Persons Bureau." questions to him were well put. "His size? Under medium height. Small bones . . . yes, small bones . . . a slender body."

Lilac begging, pleading for the help of the police, the FBI. "That money he carried, Mr. Randall. Somebody could have seen . . ."

"On a dark street in the night," the man Randall a-

greed. "Or somewhere in the country on a lonely road."

"We don't even know *which* country," Lilac sobbed.

Chester thought: Bert was an unpredictable man with malignant ways. "Look in the brothels," he said. "Look in the lowest drinking and gambling dens. Look where there is corruption."

Randall had turned and stared at him. Randall was a powerful brown man — hair, eyes, and manner. A powerful brown man. As he left the house Randall made a friendly remark showing good taste. "What a beautiful settee."

"I chose it carefully. We will find the proper pieces to complement it as we can afford to do so."

"That's the way to make a home."

"True. By eliminating vice and vulgarity from the home, as one eliminates the unworthy from one's circle of friends."

Randall studied him curiously a moment, the spoke to Lilac. "We'll do all we can to find your brother, Mrs. Paxton. But the trail is cold, now."

ON THE NEXT day, a Saturday, when working in the little garden he had seen Lilac talking to the driver of the trash truck. Had watched idly as she continued to stare as if fascinated at the slowly-moving

steel and as she lingered eyeing the great gray truck as it moved down the street.

Idleness was a vice. His wife should not be standing in the street but working at her household tasks as was seemly. Somehow, he must help her to know. There was so much evil in hidden shapes throughout the world. How could the people recognize it? All of it? How could they overcome what they could not recognize?

The wind howled and moaned that night, a hot wind that was a live, fetid creature on the prowl, heavy with lust. Sweating, Chester threw off the bedsheets and sat up crouched over against the footboard, his arms dangling.

And the door of his room opened and his wife, eyes flaring, disheveled, cheeks wet with tears of rage, cried out, "You killed my brother! You killed Bert the day you had the old sofa taken away in the truck!"

Dazedly he looked at the woman, so slovenly, so emotional. "The hand of God killed Bert, if anyone did," he muttered dimly. What was it she held in her hands? His old tobacco jar that he had ceased using, for tobacco was a temptation of the devil.

"In here . . ." she shook the jar . . . "I found the roll of bills Bert always carried on him! I

went to your house and found the springs from the sofa hid in a closet! You murderer!"

Did she not realize that Bert had not passed the tests? Had not passed even *one* test? His head itched so terribly that he must rub it with his hands. Rub hard. If only the woman would be silent. "Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out and the spark of his fire shall not shine!" he shouted suddenly, and leapt from the bed to face her. "Bert was blasphemous, a glutton, and a drunkard. He was cruel . . ."

Something made Chester turn. He was chilled to the bone and the mast creaked ominously somewhere close . . . close . . . but the ship would not move out of harbor. Fog came crowding around him but he could see that terrible little figure at the window — that awful brown, bearded little face, like the face of the ancient Salem judge, the paws tearing at the screen. Chester threw himself at the window, beating back the monkey, but it was too late; the screen had ripped wide, and Micajah was inside.

And Micajah jumped on him and Chester fell down under the weight of the small monkey. And now the fear that he had known without knowing came over him, that which he had lacked was turning him into a

vacuum. His flesh was squeezed dry of living juice, drop by drop, his skin flaked in shreds, his desiccated soul was shriveling. Where were the righteous who had guided his thoughts and actions? In one awful moment Chester knew that *they* were in the lowest pit of Hell.

"I didn't know . . ." Some dread, abominable spirit-cloak lifted from him then. And he knew he wanted to devote his life to Lilac; to laugh with her, and to protect her . . . and oh, the terrible waste of his pettiness which had become hatred.

"Lilac, my dear kind friend . . . forgive . . ."

But she could not hear him. He lifted his eyes to the terrified woman. "I swear I didn't know . . ." But there was no force in his throat nor tongue to dredge up the words. If only he could kill the monkey! He felt the enormous effort he was making to lift his hands, to grab the monkey's neck. And he held the neck of Micajah between feeble hands and tightened those hands.

A shrill, triumphant animal shriek shattered the room in piercing tones that sounded incredibly like, "Burn — burn!" On the floor was a heap of ashes where Chester Paxton had fought the evil of his own mind. And the monkey went running out into the night to find . . .
. . . a new master.

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Almost Immortal

by Austin Hall

When one becomes permanently addicted to weird or science fiction, and goes on to encounter other addicts — either relative contemporaries or old-timers — one begins to hear about the great authors and great stories of yesteryear, the "golden age" of fantastic fiction, etc. As August Derleth and many others have correctly noted, this feeling seldom has any relationship to the actual literary value of the stories placed in the period, but is rather connected with the thrill of discovery — often aided and abetted by the fact that the discoverer is usually a young person who has not as yet had very much exposure to the real masterpieces of literature and thus has not developed very fine tastes and discriminations or much awareness of the standards for excellence. The attachment is an emotional one and sometimes one makes a sad mistake in re-reading the old stories that seemed so wonderful at the time.

At the time I first became an addict, the veterans were still speaking of the golden days of the Munsey magazines, and one of the authors frequently mentioned with reverence was Austin Hall. In his book, *In Search of Wonder*, Damon Knight conducts a dissection of Hall which is in the same league with Mark Twain's dissection of the novels of J. Fenimore Cooper. Having read *The Blind Spot* some time before reading the Knight essay (with which it was chiefly concerned) I cannot say that Damon missed the nail — Hall was fully as bad as this in the well-known collaboration with Homer Eon Flint (who, in some of his other stories wasn't always that bad by any means). What Damon missed, and it's a very easy thing for one with alert critical faculties, was that — for 'a' that — *The Blind Spot* packed an enormous load of suspense and was fun to read, despite the fact that the pay-off was far below the level of the build-up, even as a suspense story. Hall was a very uneven writer in that a few of his stories, with all his faults, weren't as bad as 'a' that! And the present tale, which first appeared in *Munsey's ALL-STORY MAGAZINE*, October 7, 1916, has more of the Hall strengths than weaknesses.

THERE WERE three of us: Robinson, Hendricks, and myself.

Robinson had had a varied career: soldier, policeman, lawyer, and several other professions which he never divulged, but which kept continually cropping out in his conversation.

I had an idea he had also been a sailor and had sailed over all the seven seas. There seemed to be no country which he had not visited; no people, nor race, nor tribe of which he knew not the characteristics; nor any institution with whose history and development he had not an intimate knowledge.

Indeed, it was on the historical side that he was the most remarkable. The scope of his intellect seemed to embrace everything. From the Chaldeans down, all was to him an open book. He appeared to know as much about Nebuchadnezzar as about me.

All the great lights of history were to him as men living and present; he would tell of their foibles and greatness, their manners and personal appearance with as much vividness and distinctness as if they were seated by his side for portrayal. Then he would lapse off into gibbering of a kind which I could not understand, into Chaldaic, Sanskrit, and what not.

Again he would drift off into anecdote and speak of an inci-

dent wherein Caesar and Pompey, and another character I knew not of, were the principals. He knew anecdotes by the million; there seemed to be no limit to the supply with which he amused me from day to day; nor do I ever remember his relating the same one twice.

Big and little, large and small, people and kings, he appeared to have them all at his fingers' ends. I wondered sometimes that he did not write history, he who knew more than all the historians put together. Once I asked him, but he only shrugged.

"I have no time." He laughed. "I am a loafer. Besides, I know too much. Were I to tell the truth I would be called a liar."

The other man, Hendricks, was a friend of Robinson's, an attorney who had come up to the mountains to recuperate. He and Robinson had just been through some terrible ordeal, which had played havoc with them, both mentally and physically.

He had not the wonderfully retentive memory of his friend, nor his marvelous command of language, though he did appear to have a fair smattering of the law, and a very fair education. Most of the time he spent as I did, in loitering about and in listening to the everlasting eloquence of Robinson.

As for myself, I was purely passive.

It was our custom to come out on the veranda at night and to discuss books under the fragrance of a good cigar.

I had on this day been reading a novel of the very sensational order, one that had to do with a plot of the purely imaginative type, wherein the characters were taken out of the life of ordinary reality and transplanted into the realm of the grotesque and the terrible.

I held that all works of true literary merit should contain, as a basic feature, the elements of real life, and that in their ramifications they should hold by all means to life as it is, and to avoid transgressing the regions of the impossible. For the work at hand I had but little use, and I criticized it severely as a thing absurd and ridiculous.

It was moonlight, and for some moments after I had finished my tirade, we sat watching the shadows among the hills. Robinson was usually loquacious, but tonight he was strangely quiet. Undoubtedly he was thinking. He scarcely noticed my talk at all; but sat there working his cigar at both ends, chewing and smoking, dreaming, and apparently in the land of far away, until the moon, passing behind a cloud, and the flood of mellow light ceasing, he turned to his friend.

"Hendricks, how long has it been since I escaped from that beast?"

"Third of January, 1915, and this is the third of May," answered Hendricks. "Exactly four months. Why?"

"Oh, nothing much. Our friend here is skeptical, and believes only in the commonplace; he is like all the rest of mankind, but I think we can cure him. I propose that we relate to him our own experience, and prove to him how one man managed to live for ten thousand years in the enjoyment of youth and vigor; how I came to be devoured alive; how it happens that I am living tonight to tell the tale."

"Tell him, if you wish," answered Hendricks. "I'll corroborate you as long as you stick by the truth."

Robinson moved his chair closer to mine and sat so that I could get a full and a perfect view of his whole person.

"Do you see any marks on me?" he began; "any toothmarks or anything like that? No? Yet would you believe me were I to tell you that I have been devoured alive. Not only that, but digested and enjoyed."

"I certainly would not," I answered.

"Of course not," he replied, "and really I don't much blame you. Time was, and not so many years ago at that, when I would have said the same thing. Nevertheless, what I am about to tell you is the gospel truth, as you will learn from my friend Hendricks."

And Robinson plunged instantly into the following story.

I

ABOUT SIX YEARS ago, after some time spent in the islands, I returned in a practically penniless state to San Francisco. Besides my baggage and wearing apparel I could not have possessed much more than forty dollars.

One day, after I had tramped over a great portion of the city, climbing skyscrapers, invading factories, and I know not what in my never-ceasing search for employment, I struck a crowd surging up Montgomery, and like a chip in the tide, drifted along with it.

Both sides of the street on which I walked were lined by office buildings on whose serried windows were hung, painted and gilded, the signs and placards of numerous lawyers, doctors, corporations, and insurance companies. Among them my attention was attracted to a particular attorney's sign, whose reading in gold letters had on me a strange and gladdening effect. It read:

W. E. HENDRICKS

Attorney at Law

I had known a W. E. Hendricks before going to the islands. We had been classmates and roommates while at college, and I remembered now, with

a flash of eager hope, that it had always been his desire to build up a practice in some Western State, preferably in California.

A moment later I was in the office, all trembling with eagerness over the voice which came from the adjoining room. Sure enough it was Hendricks — Bill Hendricks, the one man whom above all others, under my present indigent circumstances, I would have chosen to meet.

Naturally I moved my belongings to the quarters of Hendricks, where, under the spur of poverty, I lived on his bounty while seeking employment.

One morning, about a month later, I entered the office and found Hendricks, as usual, deep in the intricacies of his profession. Scattered over and about his desk were his everlasting law books, legal papers, and documents, an evening paper, and to one side an early edition of the *SAN FRANCISCO MERCURY*, which, without looking up, he passed over to me for perusal.

"You will find," he said, "an advertisement in the help-wanted column which it may be to your advantage to look up."

The advertisement was marked with a blue pencil, and I had but little trouble in locating it. It was for a companion, and I must say it was the most peculiar advertisement of its kind that I had ever read. It was worded something like this:

WANTED — A companion for an elderly gentleman; applicant must be about twenty-six years of age, exactly five feet eleven inches in height and must weigh between one hundred and eighty and eighty-five pounds. He must possess a small knowledge of the law; also he must be a good conversationalist and be able to give proofs as to his perfect health and vigor. No applicant with any symptom of disease or any infirmity whatsoever will be considered. Anyone answering these qualifications can procure immediate and lucrative employment by calling . . .

The address of a Dr. Runson on Rubic Avenue followed.

Strange to say, although the conditions were so peculiar and various, and so impossible of filling for the ordinary man, they fitted me to a nicety.

It was almost as if I had received a special order to report for duty. I was exactly five feet eleven inches in height, and had weighed only the day before, one hundred and eighty-three pounds, so that I had a leeway of two pounds in one direction and three in the other. Besides, I possessed a college education and knew considerable about the law. If I had any weakness or infirmity of any kind I had not as yet noticed it. On top of this, I was a very fair conversationalist; at least I had always been considered so by my friends.

The position seemed made for me, and I decided to apply for it immediately.

II

AN HOUR LATER I had made my way to Rubic Avenue, where I found the rendezvous to be a most comfortable old two-story house with large, deep verandas, a splendid lawn, and green-shuttered windows.

In response to my knock a little woman of some fifty summers — or rather winters, for the quiet, troubled look of her face, and the gray of her hair reminded one more of that season than any other — appeared at the door.

She was trim and neat, and apparently expecting me, for she quietly opened the door and bade me, in a kind, motherly voice which I noticed at once, to enter, and without another word pressed a button beside her and disappeared, leaving me in the hall alone and waiting. In another moment a door opened above and a voice came down the stairs — a musical voice, but masculine and full of vigor.

"Is that you, Mr. Robinson? Just step up this way, please."

Naturally, I had expected to meet a stranger, and was not a little surprised at hearing the sound of my own name spoken from above.

"It is," I answered. And I remembered wondering how in the world he could know it, and who in the world he could be.

"I am glad to see you, Mr. Robinson," he greeted me when I reached the landing. "Exceedingly glad. I was expecting you. Step right in."

He opened the door and led me into a study, or rather a sitting-room, or still better, a combination of the two.

"Sit down and we will talk business," he said.

A total stranger, I was sure I had never seen him before. Of my own height; but sixty; hair turned gray; of my own features, and might have been my twin brother but for thirty years or so; hands white and immaculate, slender and deft like a gambler's; neat, dressed in black, clean shaved, and a gentleman.

All this I took in at a glance as you would take in a photograph. Nothing uncommon, nothing extraordinary, everything, barring the resemblance to myself which I might have had perfect reason to expect. Then our eyes met.

Someone has said that the eyes are the gateway to the soul. This was an archway. The idea of the common vanished and in its place was the extraordinary, the magnificent. I will condense it all by my own flash of feeling — the eyes of a multitude.

You could not look into his eyes without the feeling, instinctive, but always present,

that you were not looking into those of one man, but the eyes of a thousand. However, it was not an unpleasant feeling — more of strength, of power; the impression of an indomitable will which not all the world could change. Nevertheless they were pleasant, with a kindness and a joviality which danced and fascinated you.

"Now, Mr. Robinson," he began, when we were seated, "let us proceed. I shall talk first. You will be astonished at what I tell you: but do not wonder at that, as I am, I will admit, an extraordinary character. Though you will most likely find me common enough for a few months.

"Now, I decided yesterday to advertise for a companion, and in looking over the available candidates I found you the most desirable. I knew you could easily be reached through the papers, therefore the advertisement. Your name is John Robinson; you are twenty-six years of age. Your height is five feet eleven inches. You weighed yesterday one hundred and eighty-three pounds. You have a smattering of the law and a splendid education; you have a will of your own and are handsome; you are a good conversationalist and enjoy the most perfect health. You have travelled and have but lately returned from the islands; you have but very little money, almost broke,

in fact, and you need work. Is not all this true?"

"Most true, doctor," I returned. "I had no idea you knew me, or perhaps — Hendricks?"

"No," he broke in. "Neither. I never dreamed of your existence until yesterday. Didn't know Hendricks was living. Furthermore, just for the fun of it, when you dressed this morning, you were minus one sock and did not find it until after you had searched for it for fully ten minutes."

I laughed, for he was telling the truth, though how he came to know I couldn't make out.

"You surely have got me, unless you are another Sherlock Holmes and a past-master of deduction."

The doctor raised his hands imploringly. "Please don't," he said. "Please don't. Not that. It's too puerile, too common. I have read the stories, and admire Doyle's works, but I am, I hope, far above that. I have powers, Mr. Robinson, I will admit; but I am no detective. I never use deduction. Leave that to the mortals."

As he spoke he drew himself up in a proud, isolated sort of way.

"That is very good flesh, sir. Very good flesh!" He stepped over to my side and to my wonderment, began pinching my arm severely. I don't know why, but I drew away with much the

same feeling as a fat chicken might have, and was not a little angry.

"It is," I answered, reddening. "Perhaps I had better be going."

"Oh, no! Mr. Robinson. Not at all. Please don't be offended. I meant no harm. I was just wondering how it seemed to be young. You are so vigorous and so full of life that I envied you. But I meant no harm, sir. I assure you I meant no harm."

I sat down again and accepted his apology.

"And about this position?" I asked. "You know that is the object of my visit."

"To be sure!" said the doctor. "To be sure. Well, let me see. How would twenty dollars a week and your board and room sound?"

"Sounds all right," I replied; "depending, though, a great deal on how I earn it."

The old man's eyes twinkled and he smiled. "You will earn it, sir, by doing nothing. Absolutely nothing."

"Rather easy," I answered. "But there must be something for me to do. Even sleep is work when you are paid for it and you've got it to do whether or no."

"To be sure! To be sure! Well, we'll amend that. There will be work and it will consist of playing cards, reading, and conversation. You see, I'm lonely; I'm

getting old. I need a companion and intend to have one. I am wealthy and can afford it. It's merely a whim, sir, merely a whim."

He took an eraser from the table and began tossing it in his hand.

It all looked good to me. He was a character beyond doubt, and his personality attracted me. I foresaw that I would enjoy myself in his company. Here was someone to observe, someone to study; and perhaps a little risk. He was a man with some power, unknown perhaps, and might bear watching. That, however, was an attraction, rather than an obstacle. I would have had it just so. Therefore, we quickly came to an understanding and I agreed to remain.

III

MY POSITION turned out to be an excellent one. There was practically no work except to listen to the old gentleman, a task which I found not only interesting but agreeable. In the morning, usually between seven and eight, we had breakfast, after which we read and discussed the newspapers. About ten we would go for a short walk and make a few purchases until noon, when we had lunch.

From that time until three, my time was my own, while the doctor retired to his laboratory,

or sanctum, into which I was never invited, and none was allowed to go. This was something easily accounted for. I figured that anyone who would willingly devote his life to disease, drugs, and chemicals had all the license in the world to be queer and particular in his habits, and let it go at that.

About three the doctor reappeared, tired and nervous, and ready for a game of cards. Always at this time of day, I noticed a hungry, longing look in his eyes; but this I took to be merely the effect of some strain on his mind, some scientific fact sought for but not attained, and in no way connected it with myself. From three until dark it was the same thing day after day; cards, conversation, and reading. Rather a snap, don't you think?

So the days went by one after another. Each week my check was in hand and each week my savings mounted higher.

One day during a walk the doctor and I ran across Hendricks. Of course, I had to introduce them. The doctor seemed pleased to meet him and he to meet the doctor.

I noticed when they shook hands that they gazed squarely into each other's eyes and laughed; they seemed to see clear through each other and to take pleasure in the accomplishment. Just before we separated

Hendricks took me by the arm.

"Rob," he said, "can you come down to the office? I must see you."

"Certainly," I answered. "This afternoon, if you like. What's it about, Hen?"

The doctor had been studying a window display; but just then he happened to turn and once again he and Hendricks gazed full into each other's eyes, and once again they laughed.

"Well!" snapped Hendricks. "Here's my car. I must be going. Glad to have met you, doctor. So long, Rob."

And a moment later from the platform of the trolley he shouted back through his hands: "Important!"

We stood for some moments on the curb watching the car jolting down the street, until the fog settling in, we were left alone in the blanket of mist, gloomy and silent. Somehow I felt like the weather, cold and monotonous and dreary; my life was without sunshine.

"That man," said the doctor at length, "is dangerous."

"What man?" I snapped, turning suddenly on him.

"Why, that man, of course, the one we just left. Hendricks, of course. What other could I mean?"

"Look here, doctor, you may be a learned man all right and all that, and you may know a

good many things unknown to the rest of us poor mortals; but that won't help you one whit, when it comes to judging men. I have known Hendricks practically all my life and I know him almost as well as myself. He is honest and fearless and the best friend that ever trod on two feet. I will not hear a word against him!"

My companion smiled good-naturedly. "Whom are you working for, Mr. Robinson?"

"For you."

"Whose money are you drawing?"

"Yours."

"Well, then, I want you to have nothing to do with Hendricks. He's too analytical, too dangerous. I want you to leave him alone."

I was going to answer him with heat, but just then our eyes met and I subsided. For the life of me, I could not tell why; but a complete change came over me. I instinctively felt that the doctor was right and I was wrong.

Lunch was ready when we reached the house, and after the meal the doctor as usual, disappeared in his sanctum. Left to my own resources, I began to come to myself.

"Pish!" I exclaimed. "I'll go see Hendricks!"

In the hall I met the housekeeper. She was dusting some furniture. I had just placed my hand on the door knob when

she touched me gently on the shoulder.

"Mr. Robinson."

I noticed that her voice was low and cautious with a sort of appeal in it.

"Well, what is it?"

She lifted her kind old face to mine; her eyes full of tenderness and entreaty and I thought of pity.

"Don't you think you had better go away and stay? It's getting to be that time of the year. You don't know what you are doing or where you are going. I have been watching the doctor. I am sure the time is at hand. You are young; you are handsome, full of life, and strength. Oh! It is not fit to be so! Do say that you will go!"

She seized the lapels of my coat in her hands and looked up into my face.

"Do say it!" she repeated. "He would kill me if he knew I had warned you!"

Just then a door creaked or a window was lowered. I know not what exactly. The woman drew back, her whole form rigid with fear. We both listened. For a moment we stood like two silent statues, alert, but hearing nothing.

"Pshaw!" I said at length. "It is nothing. Now, mother, what is the trouble?"

The sound of my voice restored her and a little color came to her face.

"Go!" she said. "And be sure

to remember what I have told you!"

With that a door opened and she disappeared. As for myself, I put on my hat and started for town. A half hour later I was in Hendricks' office.

"WELL, ROB," he said, lighting a cigar, "you got here. Do you know I would have wagered a good five-dollar bill against a single unroasted peanut that you would never have made it! And I'm mighty glad you are stronger than I thought. I suppose you know what you are up against!"

Now this was a line of talk for which I was scarcely prepared, especially from Hendricks. Of course, I was somewhat worked up after the little scene with the housekeeper; but I hardly expected to find my friend in the same humor.

"Oh, say," I cut in, "are you and the old lady in cahoots? Do you want me to lose a good thing? What's the matter?"

He thought a while, went to the window and watched the traffic in the street. Presently he turned about and in his slow earnest way, began to talk.

"Look here, Rob. The gentleman to whom I was introduced today has interested me more than any other person I have ever met. He is a character I have dreamed about. I have often pictured myself meeting an individual of this species. I

must say it pleases me, though I am sorry to find you in his company. I intend to give you fair warning. I shall tell you what he is, and you can direct your future actions accordingly. But first, I want you to tell me all you know about him and what has transpired since you have taken up your position. Go ahead."

Kind of a poser, wasn't it?

But I had confidence in Hendricks. Of all the persons I had ever met, he was the last to take a dramatic posture. I knew him for a man of deep thoughts and few words; but when the words did come they were like chips of steel, sharp and to the point. Therefore, I opened my heart fully. I related to Hendricks all that I knew, including the old lady's actions and the scene in the hallway.

When I had finished he smiled and began drubbing the desk with his fingers.

"And what do you make of it?" he asked.

I threw up my hands. "You've got me, Hendricks. There's a rat in a hole somewhere; but I am not cat enough to see it."

"Well," he answered, "I am. The man's a ghoul. Ever hear of a vampire?"

"On the stage."

"Yes, and off. Not the thrilling, entrancing kind that lulls you with a scene of love and beauty and soothingly imbibes

while you are in a dream of the seventh heaven; but the real stern, genuine, reality. The kind that measures and weighs every movement of its victim, the kind that watches with the pulsating eyes of a cat every play of the muscles, every flash of emotion until, secure of its prey and sure of the moment, it feeds on its fellow."

"Pleasant prospect surely," I answered.

"Do you still wish to retain your job?"

"Why, old boy! If that old duffer made an offer to harm me I'd strangle him with my thumb and little finger!"

"You'd do nothing of the sort. That old man has mind. Your strength and muscle don't amount to a row of shucks. When the time comes," he snapped his fingers, "there'll be no Jack Robinson."

"I suppose he will make a sort of salad of me; or serve me up as a soup," I put in.

"Hardly that. Listen. Rob. Did you ever hear of Allen Doreen?"

"The man who walked into a London cottage and disappeared from the face of the earth even though the place was surrounded by watchers? I've heard of him surely. And I consider the story sheer nonsense."

"Well, I don't," snapped Hendricks. "The man who had charge of those watchers was my own father. He was Allen

Doreen's best friend. Furthermore, when Doreen entered that house, there was a man sitting in plain view of the watchers; and that man was the exact counterpart of your doctor friend. In half an hour they had both disappeared.

"When they broke into the house it was searched from cellar to attic and from attic to cellar back again; but neither skin nor teeth nor hair was found of either. The place was completely surrounded; yet no one was seen leaving the house. It was as if they had dissolved in air, so completely was it done. That was the last ever seen of Allen Doreen. My father worked on the case for years. The police of London never quite gave it up, yet, it is a mystery today — no evidence whatever, no sign, no clue."

"Perhaps," said I, "a secret passage."

"The place was torn down three weeks afterward," Hendricks returned; "the foundations were torn up for a larger building. Such a thing would have been found. There was none."

"Well," I said, "you've got me. Anyhow, I'll hold my job. It's the most exciting way of doing nothing I've yet found. Besides I've started on the serial, and I'm going to see the next chapter."

Hendricks took a fresh cigar.

"Well, that settles it, Rob.

You're the same old daredevil. Nothing can frighten you, not even a real, genuine, live boggy man. And I'm glad of it. We'll see the thing through. Between you and me, I think we'll catch the fox and know his game. Likewise there'll be a solution of Allen Doreen.

"So far your cases are parallel; soft snap, nothing to do, pleasant doctor, advertisement, height, weight, and measurement all agree. All we've got to do is change the results. That's up to us. Now I'm going to show you something."

From a drawer in his desk he drew out a small old-fashioned case which he unsnapped and passed over to me. It contained a photograph.

"Perhaps," said he, "you have seen someone who looks like that."

I took the picture and held it to the light. It was the doctor.

"Looks like it, doesn't it," asked my friend. "And perhaps it is. That is the man who did away with Allen Doreen. I am the exact image of my father. He recognized me at once. Now you see why we laughed in each other's faces. It was a challenge. Mine was a laugh of triumph; his, of derision and contempt. We shall see who is the fox. And now, to get down to business what is it that you propose to do?"

"Well, I see nothing else to

do but to return to my work and if anything unusual or threatening occurs — why, I'm the very little boy who will put a stop to it."

"I'm glad that you are so confident. However, I am going to take a few precautions — or rather, I have already taken them. Your house is even now under surveillance; there are three detectives of my own hiring on the watch, one each in the houses adjoining and one in the house across the street. They know fully what an important case they are on, and are aware of the consequent glory, if they are successful.

"They are the shiftest, nerviest, and cleverest of the force and understand perfectly with what a wise old fox they are dealing.

"Now if anything very unusual should happen, and you wish to notify the outside world, all you have to do is to place a piece of paper in a window where it may be seen, and if you need help, two — one in each end of the window. Myself, I shall keep hidden. The old fox is onto me and consequently I shall keep out of sight until such time as I am needed, when I will be there."

"All right, Hendricks," I said, "I'll do as you say. But really, after all, I don't believe the old doc is as bad as you say. There must be some mistake. I have an idea it will all come out right

and the only thing to result will be a little foolish feeling for ourselves."

There was an embarrassed pause.

"As you will, Rob," shrugged Hendricks. "Only I wish to take no chances. You have a perfect right to your own opinion."

IV

"BACK AGAIN?"

It was the doctor; he met me at the door, a smile on his face and his hand extended; he was in his best humor.

"Yes," said I, removing my hat, "I had a little business to transact and thought it was best done before it was too late."

"That's good!" returned the doctor, a twinkle in his eye. "Always keep your affairs in good order. Everybody should do that. Neglect nothing. That's been my motto, always and at all times. We know so little of what is going to happen."

At that moment I would have given I know not what for a more definite knowledge of what the next few days might have in store.

If I was uneasy, I think I carried it off quite well and I don't think the doctor had any suspicion. In a few minutes I was my own self and was dealing out the cards as deftly and easily as ever I had done.

"This is a fine game," said the doctor, who was winning.

"Splendid," I returned, inasmuch as I was paid for losing. "Splendid!"

Swish, swish, swish; the cards glided over the table — the doctor's. I dealt myself three. Swish, swish, swish — the doctor's; clip, clip, clip — our hands were dealt. The first trick was the doctor's and his smile grew broader. The next was mine, and the next, and the next; the whole hand in fact. With the turn of luck his good humor vanished.

"A rum hand," he muttered. "Gimme something good!"

However, it was his own deal, and he surely treated himself well. All the trumps were his, likewise the tricks. His good humor returned.

"Do you know, my boy, I always like to win on this night? This, you know is the twentieth of September, the night of all nights. Every twenty years it returns."

He was watching the cards as they glided toward him, picking them up, one by one, with his long tapered fingers, and talking more apparently to himself than to me.

"Every twenty years! I have reduced it to a formula, a science. Twenty years, two minutes, fifty-eight seconds!" He drew out his watch. "Fifteen minutes of eight. Over two hours yet. Two hours and over."

He began playing again — silently — a smile on his lips,

anticipating. It was a sort of sensual smile and I noticed an odd look of anticipation in his eyes as he watched the cards. The tricks were all his and he drew back entirely satisfied.

"What's this, doc? Why every twenty years? Why must you win tonight? Experiment or fact?"

"Fact," answered the doctor, "fact. I win for luck; luck always goes with the winner. You lead."

Again we went to playing; but in the intervals of play I began, absently, like one merely passing time, to roll a newspaper which was lying on the table. You may think I was perturbed; but I was not at all; I was merely doing what my friend had advised — playing safe.

If I were going to see the thing through to the end, I calculated that perhaps a little help at the climax would be a thing most convenient. Of course, my mind was working. Hendricks had called the doctor a vampire. I had never seen one; but my imagination had pictured a thing vastly different from this.

During the silent moments I watched him — cool, clear-eyed, and kindly, his every movement an act of grace, his whole manner the embodiment of fascination. When he smiled the very atmosphere seemed to ripple, his clear eyes fairly danced with

mirth and you felt a sort of infinite joy in the mere privilege of sharing their pleasure.

I had known him for many days — this man, and during all that time I had found him nothing but kindness and consideration, a companion, jolly at all times.

What a climax of things ridiculous to classify this man with a species of which mankind has refused a classification with either man or beast. Can you blame me for laying the paper back on the table? I had only folded it.

THE GAME continued, the doctor winning regularly and deriving an infinite joy therefrom; and I, with all I had on my mind, watching him intently for ever so small a sign that might signify or prove him to be anything but that which he seemed.

The clock struck nine. It came all at once as often happens in the silent hours, a clashing that seems to step right out of the wall, seizes you by the throat, and startles you out of your marrow. We both started; but the doctor, I was sure, was really frightened.

He half rose in his chair, seized his watch in his left hand, and stood gazing from it to the clock in a sort of palsy. A look such as I never saw in a mortal came into his eyes; fairly danced and glittered, and

as he gazed at me bewildered, I would have sworn that they dissolved, and that I looked not into the eyes of one, but into those of a hundred.

Snap. The doctor closed his watch.

"My!" he sighed. "How that did startle me! I thought it was ten and I was too late. Let us have some wine."

He reached for the bell and pressed it energetically, almost savagely.

"Do you know, Mr. Robinson," he asked while we were waiting, "do you know what it means to me?"

"Naturally, I do not," I replied. "You having never told me."

"Well, I'll tell you" — he leaned back in his chair — "it means this: In an hour's time I shall be either alive or dead. If my experiment is a success, you will see me a miracle, alive, young, strong, handsome, a being to marvel at and admire. If it should fail you will witness the most abject and miserable death that ever has been or ever will be seen on this earth.

"In a few moments from that time I shall begin to dwindle, to tumble, to struggle, to cry out; my pleading will ring in your ears for years to come. When you are dreaming and when you are waking, you will see my fearful image; I shall be a horror and an abomination

to you. In a few moments, I shall be no larger than this inkstand, and I shall be growing smaller and smaller until at last, I disappear — a mere speck of nothing forever and forever.

"But you, who are standing here — you will have seen an army, a strange phantom host, jabbering, incoherent, indistinct, a confusion of the ungodly with the godly — a babel of conflicting tongues, a struggling of opposing nationalities, a maelstrom of phantom hatred, with myself the center of it all, reviled, execrated, loathed, and despised. Their curses will ring in your ears for a lifetime.

"I will stand here alone; they will vanish; one by one they will step into a grave of shadows and disappear, and you will be left alone with nothing but a problem, the solution of which will baffle not only you, but your friends for all time."

HE was quite cool now and I could see that he was perfectly sane, although my firm faith in his manhood — the good old gentleman kind — began to flicker perceptibly.

"And it was for this," I asked, "that you employed me?"

"Exactly."

"You wished to make use of me?"

"Naturally. For what does one man hire another if it is not his services? You will help me in this crisis. It will be a

triumph, a great one, for one or the other of us. In any case, you will have beheld something to witness which there are many who would willingly pay a fortune."

The door opened and the housekeeper brought in the wine and the glasses. I bowed to her and took the occasion to nonchalantly place the roll of paper in the window; the curtain was up and I was fairly sure that it could be seen from across the street. My action I was sure, was not noticed, for the doctor was pouring out the wine, while the woman was standing alongside the table watching him.

Evidently she was greatly excited, for I noticed that her hands trembled violently, while her face, so calm and healthy usually, was ashy white, to which her lips drawn down at the corners as if from some load of anguish, gave that troubled and stricken look of one standing under an impending disaster.

"Mrs. Green" — it was the doctor who spoke — "do you know the day of the month?" It was said in a cool, steady tone, but there was mockery in it.

The woman started and her hands clenched; a very storm of fury broke upon her. If the doctor had wished to goad her to madness, he had done it well and with but a sentence. Anyway, it seemed to please him,

for he smiled sweetly while she broke upon him.

"You!" she shouted as she leveled her trembling, accusing finger. "You! You murderer! You know I know! And you dare ask me! What day is it! What day of the month is it! Yes, ask, when you know so well! It is the twentieth of September, that it is! Your anniversary! Your celebration of crime — of murder!"

"Where is Allen Doreen? Down in your black, warped, crime-bespattered soul you are gloating over a murder this very night! Where is Allen Doreen? Was I not with you twenty years ago when you murdered that poor, innocent lad? And because I did not witness the actual deed, do you suppose for an instant that I doubted your guilt?"

"I am your housekeeper now and I was your housekeeper then, though you little knew it when you engaged me six months ago! Why did you hire Allen Doreen? Why did you pay him fabulous sums to do merely nothing? What became of him? What did you do with him? Answer me that! Why have you this man here? Sir," she continued, turning to me, "unless you take my advice and leave this house at once, you will never see daylight again."

"Mrs. Green! This is enough! Enough!"

And before I could interfere

he had seized her by the arms and ejected her from the room, turning the key in the door as he did so.

V

HE WAS A man of quick action, and it was done in a twinkling, almost before I could think.

But the scene had decided me.

The picture of the old woman standing there in the lamplight, her face ashen, her eyes flashing, and her accusing finger speaking as loudly as her tongue, will ever live in my memory.

And I can see the doctor still, sitting there with the wine-filled glasses, smiling cynically, egging her on with his mocking, taunting laugh.

I would have rolled a second paper and brought Hendricks and his men thundering through the door, but for a thought. I was morally sure that this man was a murderer, and I was just as certain that he was contemplating another crime this night, with myself for the victim.

But what was the proof?

I had none; only an old woman's word, and that had all been before the law already. I could not call Hendricks yet. If I were afraid, I could walk out of the door. The doctor could not stop me. But I was not afraid. No, there was but one thing to do — to wait. When the time came

I would throttle him with my thumb and finger just to show Hendricks; and then call in my friends.

The doctor was in an apologetic mood, though I noticed that he put the key in his pocket. Not that I cared, for I considered myself enough of his master to take it away from him whenever needed, only I noticed it.

"You mustn't mind her," he said. "Mrs. Green is a good old soul, only a little erratic, that's all." He pointed to his forehead. "She has these spells now and then. She lost a dear friend once; but the poor old soul has a haunting idea, of which I can never rid her, that I was the cause of his disappearance. She has been my housekeeper for years. She is splendid. Let us get back to our game."

Once again we sat down, sipping the wine and playing cards. The clock above was slowly ticking toward the fatal ten, and the doctor was having all the luck. I was very curious and expectant, but kept a cool head, watching every movement of my companion.

What were his plans? What were his preparations? I could see none, only his everlasting playing.

He seemed superbly confident, humming a low tune, and smiling as buoyantly as a boy of twelve. There was surely

something in the air, but try as I might, I could make nothing out of it. I waited.

It was half past nine — twenty minutes of the hour; the room was hot and stuffy, and I began to feel nervous. In spite of all my efforts, I felt myself slipping; a great lump came in my throat which I could not down, and I could hear my heart thumping against my ribs, pulsating so loudly that I was rather surprised that the doctor did not notice it.

Fifteen minutes to ten. I was watching keenly.

At your first move, old man, I will strangle you, I said to myself.

But the doctor did not move. Instead, he kept on playing, calm, happy, and in perfect good humor. His very coolness nettled me. Why this everlasting delay and these infernal cards?

I was cutting, when the first sign came, and I shall never forget it.

It was a sensation, a feeling I wish never again to experience. For the first time, I knew that I was playing with a power behind the conception of man; that I was eating with the devil and was using a short spoon. It was like a wave; my courage vanished and my confidence was gone. When I looked up the doctor was peering at me.

Lord, what eyes! Cavernous, flaming with the most unholy

light of ages! With a cry of horror I dropped the cards.

The doctor said not a word; his whole body seemed to shrivel and become head; and that in turn, to transform and disintegrate and to slowly reform and grow into eyes, immense and terrible, two great green fires, consuming, devouring, unearthly.

What was it! What was it! A scream!

The eyes vanished; the doctor was sitting there before me. Yes, it was a scream; a woman's scream. How good it seemed! A door slammed across the street; there was a scurrying of feet. I was myself. I seized the second roll and started for the window.

"Put down that paper!"

It was the doctor who spoke. The clock stood two minutes to ten.

"Put down that paper!"

I laughed. "I'll do nothing of the sort! Stop me, if you can!"

In a flash he was at me. Here I knew myself his master. Arms outstretched, he made for me and I could not help laughing at his awkwardness. Timing him to a dot, I let drive my left. It was a well-directed blow, and I knew it for a knockout. He was coming head on when my blow landed.

Landed! Say, rather, entered, for my fist entered his jaw like so much mist, passed through his head and out the other side.

Unable to believe my senses, I shot out my right. It passed clean through him. I could see my fist out of his back.

With a cry of horror I sprang out of his reach. I could hear voices; someone was forcing the front door.

"Hendricks! Hendricks!" I screamed.

The old man was after me like a demon.

"Aye, Hendricks!" he mocked. "Hendricks! I fooled the father and I'll fool the son! Every twenty years I eat a man, and I'll eat you as I have the others! Give me that paper!"

He made a lunge, and before I could sidestep, he had me. I struggled, but it was useless. It was like fighting with smoke. I knew I was gone; I was helpless. My friend was outside.

But he was too late.

Here Robinson lit a cigar.

"Well," I asked, "what happened?"

He puffed for a moment.

"Hendricks will have to tell you the rest; my part is done. Go ahead, Hen, and give him the other part."

Hendricks took up the narrative as follows:

VI

WHEN ROBINSON left my office, I was extremely puzzled. My friend would do his best,

and if the old fox caught him unawares, well, then, he was a slyer fox than I imagined.

Of the man himself, I was morally certain. I returned to my desk and studied the picture over and over again. They were the same, barring only the difference in the style of the clothes, which, of course, counted for nothing.

There was one thing, and one thing only, which bothered me.

These two men were of the same age; yet this picture had been taken over twenty years before. Surely the living picture — the man himself — should have aged more.

The telephone rang.

"Hello! Hello! Who is it?"

"Is this Mr. Hendricks?"

"It is. Who is this?"

"Brooks, at Rubic Avenue.

We have had the house under surveillance ever since you detailed us. Mr. Robinson has just returned. The old lady — the housekeeper, the woman you mentioned — was just here. You are right, all right. She was mixed up with the Allen Doreen affair, and I think she will be our main witness. I want you to get out here and have a talk with her.

"And, by the way, the old lady says that this is the day, and we want to take no chances.

"She has gone back to the house just at present; she is mortally afraid of the doc, says that if he rang and found her gone,

he would surely kill her. When can you come?"

"Right away. I will be out there immediately."

In a few minutes, I was on a car bound for Rubic Avenue.

My men I found in the house across the street, which they seemed to be making their headquarters. It was now five-thirty.

"Well," said I, "what news?"

"Not much of anything," said Smythe. "But we are awaiting the woman; she promised she would return as soon as you arrived, so we could settle all our plans. She says there is no danger until some time after nine, absolutely none, because the doctor, as she calls him, never works at his trade, or whatever you may call it, in the daytime.

"Brooks, who is on the watch, reports that Robinson and the doctor have just entered one of the front rooms upstairs, and, from the looks, are playing cards."

"Very likely," I answered. "Robinson, who has just left me, says that is their chief pastime."

Then I told them about my interview with Robinson and the plans we had laid.

"So, you see, our best tactics will be to wait and watch."

Well, sir, we waited.

About six came the old lady. She was terribly excited and very much worried; but beyond a recital of her former experi-

ence and the fact that she had heard the doctor mumbling, "The twentieth, the twentieth," several times during the past few days, I can't say that she had much information to impart. But on this one thing she was very sure and very much worked up.

"Oh, how glad I am that you men are here to help Mr. Robinson!" she said. "Only I'm afraid, terribly afraid. Perhaps you are not smart enough. Oh, he's clever; it will be just like him to do his work right in front of you, and you not be able to do a thing."

"He would have to be a devil to do that," said Smythe. "I suppose you know that the house is surrounded, and that nobody can leave it nor enter without at least ten eyes upon him."

"I know it. I know it," said the old lady. "But what's been done before can be done again. I tell you, for myself, I ain't afraid, he won't harm me; but I do care for this young man. He won't listen to me. Says he's not afraid and all that. But I tell you all quite frankly, the doctor's not human. No, sir, he's something else; when a man can do what he does, he's something, and that ain't man either." With that she left us.

There was a good deal in what she said, and I told them so; but Smythe shook his head.

"I've heard of this Doreen

case before, Mr. Hendricks, read of it, and I have always said I would have liked to have been there. Now, here's our chance. We have Robinson over there, big and strong, athletic, no fool and no coward, and we have a bunch of men around us, all of them trained, all alert; and we have Mrs. Green there in the house with them, and a code of signals. Everything is in our favor. We can catch the old fox red-handed, save Robinson, and clear up the Doreen mystery, and all at the same time."

ALL OF US settled down now to our vigil. From our vantage ground of an upper room we could look across into the room where, sure enough, sat Robinson and the doctor, both apparently enjoying a friendly game of cards. It was not too close nor yet so far but that we could make them out quite plainly; the curtains were open and, of course, a great deal of the room was in our plain view.

Well, nothing happened. The minutes drew into hours, and as the first excitement wore away the time began to grow lazy. I began to get sleepy. I think it was some time after nine when Brooks nudged me.

"Look! Look! What's Robinson doing?"

Across the street I could see Rob. He was rolling up a paper.

"Was it one or two?"

I got up, but he seemed to

laugh and lay it down again, and to resume his playing. Nothing more happened for about a quarter of an hour; then suddenly the old man started from his chair, pressed his hand to his forehead, and in a startled way began to talk to his companion. A few moments later, after he had resumed his seat, the door opened, and we could see the old man and the old woman shaking their fists angrily at each other — at least the old woman shook hers. Then it was that Rob put the paper in the window.

"Ah!" exclaimed Brooks. "Now there is something doing over yonder. What'll we do?"

"Beginning to be interesting," I answered, getting up. "You stay here, Brooks, while I get the men together. Keep a close lookout. If Bob gives the other signal or if you see anything suspicious, be sure and signal to us, and we will break in immediately."

Below I gathered up the men, placed two at the back, two at the sides, and kept with me, two others. Every inch of the house was to be watched. The light was at the window, and the house was silent. For some time we waited; but there was only the thumping of our hearts and the everlasting pulsating throb of the city night. After a little a window was raised, and I heard Brooks' voice.

"Hendricks," he said coolly, "now is your time. Enter quietly and make your way up to the room. You'll have your man easy enough."

I had just reached the steps when a woman screamed, and a frightened, fearful cry it was, to be sure. And then, running and almost falling, I could hear someone coming down the stairs.

With a cry we made for the door; but at the same instant, the housekeeper opened it, slammed it, and stood before us. She was white and trembling. "Oh," she cried, "for goodness sake, hurry! Hurry! It's the devil! Sure, sure it's the devil!"

"Woman," I almost shrieked, "look what you have done! We are locked out!"

"Burst it! Burst it open!" came an order behind.

It was Brooks.

"Hendricks! Get in there! Get in there!"

With the force of two hundred pounds he landed against the door, and in a minute we rolled, men, door, locks, and all, a heap on the floor. The woman screamed again, and above everything I could hear a voice familiar and distinct. It was Rob.

At a bound I threw myself to my feet and dashed up the stairs. A light was streaming beneath the door, and there was a peculiar noise coming from the inside, a sort of chuck-

le. Brooks passed me, and both together, we landed against the door. It was locked; we knew that, so we sent it crashing to the floor.

The room was empty!

VII

WE WERE baffled, defeated! I had been mocked to my face! My best friend was gone!

A sort of haze came over me, and for the next few minutes I remember almost nothing. Then I noticed the blaze of light, the cards about the table, the empty wine glasses and bottles, and the soft green carpet, while I could see Brooks dashing about the room, stamping on the floor, pounding the walls, and swearing a great, copious string of heavy oaths.

"You below, there!" he shouted. "Are those men here yet? Well, hold tight! Don't let an inch of this house escape you! I'm going to comb over it with a fine-tooth comb! And if we don't get him, I'll know he's the devil!"

"And that's what I think he is," said I. "I could have sworn I heard him when I reached this door!"

"And I, too," returned Brooks. "Yet, here we are, and there is neither hide nor hair of him!"

But however much my detective friend agreed with me, he would not, as he said, allow

superstition and mystic fear to get the better of him; and now, while he had a hand in the game and the thing was warm, he was going to see the house from top to bottom, attic, cellar, and sideways.

Keen over our lost prey, we set to work, and I do not believe there was ever a house searched as this one. With the help from headquarters, we went at it from every corner.

Everything was ransacked, rummaged, burst open, examined; walls were thumped, floors pounded, ceilings tested, and carpets torn up. But it all ended as I had foreseen.

When gray dawn struck, it found a house much like one stricken by a whirlwind, but never a clue that would lead us anywhere at all. I was heart-broken over Rob, and I swore by everything that I knew that I would never leave off the trail until I had either rescued or avenged him. Nor was I alone.

Brooks, with all his great confidence and splendid nonchalance of a few hours before, was a thing to look at. Truly he reminded me of a blood-hound chasing his tail. With all his skill and technique, he was getting nowhere. When daylight came he threw up his hands.

"I tell you, Hendricks, this is not a case; it is a study, and I

must have time to think. Likewise" — remembering himself — "I must eat. But I tell you one thing; I will never leave this case until either I or the doctor get each other."

Anyway, we ate. And afterward, we returned and began our search all over again. And we kept it up day in and day out, and to be doubly sure, we rented the place and moved into it. And we watched and waited, while the days grew into months, and the months into years, until I found myself five years older with a great practice and a greater mystery.

I HAD ATTAINED, by hard, grinding work, I think, a very creditable place in the legal world. I was not married, and was living with Brooks in the House of Mystery, as he chose to call it.

We kept a housekeeper — none other than the old Mrs. Green, who had held the same position under our spooky friend, the notorious Dr. Runson, for whom the police of every city of the world were looking and not finding.

There was one great, permeating idea in the house; find the doctor, avenge Robinson, and clear up the Doreen mystery.

Brooks worked on the case as one who would work on a puzzle. He was always ready; had the police oiled and

ready, prepared at any moment to reach out and grasp its victim.

Then one night, we received a sign.

AT THE time we had moved into the house I had chosen a nice cozy room to the rear, and would have made that my sleeping quarters had it not been for Brooks, who expostulated in the loudest manner.

"There is but one room in the whole house, Hendricks," he said, "in which we can sleep, and that is the little room up yonder to the front, where this scene took place, and there we'll stay."

I remember plainly. It was in September. I had been out to a social affair, and did not get in until about eleven o'clock. When I turned on the light, Brooks was snoring loudly, his head back and his mouth wide open, as though he were enjoying it. I crawled into bed with him.

How long I slept I do not know; but when I awoke some time after with a start, it was to find Brooks, or at least I thought it was he, sitting on my feet. Like any sleepy person, I became angry.

"Hey, you! Gee whiz! Brooks, get off my feet!"

Someone at my side turned, and I saw it was Brooks. "What's the matter with you?" he said.

"I'm not on your feet. Got a nightmare?"

But I was not asleep, and I knew it. There was surely something on my feet, so I raised up and looked. Sure enough, seated there in the moonlight was the form of a man.

It was Robinson!

FOR A moment, I was dazed, my heart jumping and my throat swollen.

"Don't you know me, old boy?" it said.

Hardly believing my own eyes, nor my ears either, I dropped back on the pillow and lay thinking. Finally I reached over and pinched Brooks, who was almost awake.

"What's the matter?"

"Do you see anything?"

"Where?"

"At the foot of the bed. On my feet."

"Pooh!"

With an air of disgust and distrust, my bedfellow raised himself and immediately dropped back on the pillow.

"Who — who is it?" he whispered.

The sound of his voice, and the fact that he, as well as I, could see someone, reassured me. That Brooks had seen and recognized was an assurance I needed, for I must say I was in a cold sweat of fear and apprehension. I raised myself to a sitting posture.

"Well?"

It was Rob who spoke, and it was the old voice.

"Is this really you, Rob?" I asked doubtfully, "or just something else?"

He laughed. "You think me a ghost, don't you, Hen? Well, to tell you the truth, I am, almost, at least, as near one as a man could get."

"Then — then you are not dead, Rob?"

"No," he answered, "I'm not dead, nor alive either, for that matter."

He got up and walked about the room, and I noticed that his walk was ghostlike, no noise, absolute silence, and he nearly six feet and one hundred and eighty pounds.

"Look here, Hendricks." He stopped to look at the clock. "I've got but a few moments to spare. It was only by superhuman struggle that I am here; only by a terrific battle of the will that I am with you; and at any moment, any second, I may leave you. I came to help you, to encourage you. Keep up your search, and some day you will be rewarded."

"I will help you. I am not dead. Far from it; I may live forever. Keep your eyes open at all times and watch personalities. I will try to lead them your way. Only be prepared when the time comes. You were right about the doctor. He was a vampire. I found out when it was too late. If you watch

and work hard enough, I will have a chance even yet."

He stopped beside the bed and looked at me longingly, his eyes filled with a yearning that was piteous. My mind was in a whirl, and my heart was beating like a trip-hammer; but in the midst of it all I had presence enough to analyze his features. The eyes were the same; the hair, the jaw, and the peculiar expression of the mouth were all his; beyond a doubt it was Robinson.

I remember the wild joy that surged through me at the certainty. I reached up to grasp him, but he drew back.

"Don't, Hen! Don't! Not now!"

He drew back; for, not to be denied, I had sprung out of the bed and was pursuing him with outstretched hands.

"Stop!"

But I would not. Instead, I followed him across the room with my hands reaching out for him.

"Well, then, if you must have it! Goodbye!"

There was a good deal of the defiant in the words, and yet a world of misery. And with that he disappeared, vanished through the solid wall as though it were the open air.

VIII

OF COURSE, we dressed

and began a most thorough examination. The doors were locked, the windows fastened, and everything was found in its accustomed place. We could get no satisfaction; there was no solution but one; and as I was no believer in ghosts or their workings, I was loath to accept it.

Still, what other solution could we give? It was either that, or we had both been the victims of a huge hallucination; and we were both too much awake, and had altogether too much pride and confidence in our own intelligence to admit that we could drift off into a state so bordering on the insane as that. How, then, were we to account for it? I admit I tossed up my hands. It was too much for me.

If Rob was not dead, and he said he wasn't, how had he gained entrance to our room? Surely none but a phantom could have vanished in such a complete and marvelous manner. Furthermore, if alive, what reason had he for keeping himself hidden, especially from his best friend, myself, whose help he needed, and from whom he had just now sought assistance?

I could see none. But one thing I did do. I cursed the impatient haste and unreason with which I had just acted. Had it not been for my own foolishness and lack of tact, we

might have had a few good practical clues on which to work. Rob must have had something to impart, or he would never have paid us this visit, and so I reasoned with Brooks.

"Pshaw!" said my friend. "The man was murdered. That's plain as day. Who did it is the goal. The case has just begun, but I'm going to solve it, believe me. Meantime, I'm going back to bed."

Going to bed and going to sleep were two different things; so we spent the rest of the night in argument and in the consuming of innumerable cigars. And when the morning broke and the gray light of dawn streamed through the windows, it found two men with two different views, I for the living, and he for the dead.

Which of us was right, you shall see for yourself.

I WAS ENGAGED on the Huxley case, with which you and everybody else who reads the papers must be familiar. As I have said, I had risen not a little in my profession; my practice was large, my reputation established, and, best of all, I had the name of getting most anything I went after.

At the same time, I was on a dead level with myself, and knew my limitations, even though I did not let others into the secret.

The Huxley case, you will

remember, was one of those paradises for attorneys, a sea of legal entanglements wherein they could swim about to their hearts' content, breathing law, living law, sleeping law, with no way out, no exit, no escape.

I was working night and day. It was the climax of my legal career. If I won, I was made, and I was going to win.

One day, while deep in the Huxley case, I had ordered my lunch and was looking over a local paper; there was not much in it, so I was running over the market reports. I don't know how to account for it, but I have always said that the great and important changes of life are prone to come upon us suddenly and unexpectedly.

And although I have always made it a habit to watch the turning up of things, as it were, it has ever been my fortune to be caught like a drowsy sentinel, asleep at the post. How little I was aware at this moment. Everything was in the routine. The world was running smoothly; so much so, in fact, that I had to satisfy my craving for excitement with market reports.

It may have been the print, or it may have been anything. I'm sure I don't know exactly. But, anyway, when I was half through the page my eyes failed me and the whole thing blurred.

"Merely a case of nerves," you say. Perhaps so. That's

what I thought. I closed my eyes and pressed my fingers against the eyeballs. The pressure brought relief for an instant, and I began rubbing them. I opened my eyes again and reached for a glass of water. The paper was still in my hand; but it was an inky black, and clean across it, in plain white letters, was the word:

ROBINSON

"Premonition," you say. Perhaps it was. Anyway, it startled me. The moment those letters were indelible in my mind, the room cleared and my vision returned. Half startled, I looked about me.

Everything was as before; if anything had happened, nobody had noticed it. It was the same prosaic, hungry crowd, and there was the usual sound of eating, of dishes and spoons, and the quiet, soft step, step, step of flitting waiters.

Nevertheless, I was a perfect tingle of excitement; my hands shook and my heart seemed to swell up within me, to fill my throat and choke me with anticipation. Something was surely going to happen. Carefully I studied everybody in the room. Then I turned clear about and looked at the door. There it was.

It was Rob!

HE WAS STANDING just

inside of the door, his soft hat slouched over his eye and his empty pipe in his hand I could see the cashier speaking to him, but he shook his head. Evidently he was looking for someone. I had half risen from my seat when our eyes met; he smiled and came quickly down the aisle. How I watched him!

"Rob, Rob, Rob," I said to myself, keeping time with his step as he came toward me. Then hesitation. The resemblance began to glimmer and fade away. The nearer he approached the less he looked like Rob. Could it really be he? How my wild hope rose and fell! When he was quite up to me I saw I was mistaken, and that he was an absolute stranger.

"Pardon me," he said, "but were you expecting me? If you don't mind, I will sit opposite you. You seemed to know me."

Know him! On closer view he seemed strangely familiar, very much like another; there was a difference and a resemblance which, added together, was indeed a puzzle.

"Your face," said I, "reminded me strangely. I took you for someone — a very old friend. And yet it could not be. I see I am wrong."

"Why?"

He looked up from the table with a strange, querulous smile.

"Why couldn't it be? Who is this person?"

A thought struck me.

"Your name is not Robinson?"

He sobered down in an instant, and began arranging his knife and fork beside his plate.

"No," he said, eying his dish; "just Jones. Ebenezer Jones. Fine name that! But suppose my name were Robinson? What would it signify?"

"What would it signify?" I repeated. "Just this. If your name were Robinson and you were the real person, whom you greatly resemble, there would be a mystery solved."

"Ha!"

My companion dropped his fork and looked up.

"What's this?" he asked. "A mystery — a real, genuine, live mystery! Have you one, sure enough? Let's have it. That's my line exactly. It's food and drink to me."

He waited; and before I knew it I was telling him what you already know. I don't know why I should have told it there in the restaurant; but from the first he seemed to have a power over me, and through it all I had that fluttering sensation and my heart kept beating "something will happen, something will happen."

"Splendid!" he exclaimed when I was through. "And have you this picture of the doctor and a picture of Robinson?"

"In my office. Yes."

"May I see them?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I would be much obliged to you. This interests me deeply. We shall go up after we eat."

In another half hour we were examining the photos.

"So this is Robinson, and this is Dr. Runson? Eh? Might have been twins but for thirty years or so. Eh! Well, I tell you, Mr. Hendricks, you needn't worry. In less than six months you will know all about it. No? You don't believe it? Well, well! Wait and see. I have a strange power, and what I say generally comes true. Even if my name is just plain Ebenezer Jones. Now, Mr. Hendricks, I have a proposition to make. How would you like a business associate?"

He staggered me.

"Well, an assistant if you will. Call me anything you like. I will name my own terms. Salary, nothing, and as much work as you can get out of me."

I was taken back.

"Know anything about the law?"

He laughed and his eyes fairly danced with amusement. The chief justice could not have been more amused at the question.

"Just give me a trial is all I ask. I want to stay in this office until this mystery is solved; and while I'm here I want something to do. You'll find it to your advantage. I know

something about law and then some. Even though my name may be just plain Ebenezer Jones."

WELL, TO MAKE the matter short, I took him in.

It was a rather sudden and strange thing to do on such a short acquaintance. I was a little surprised at myself at first, but soon found that I had made no mistake. Indeed, before many days I was shaking hands with myself.

Ebenezer settled into my office with an ease and a confidence that could only come from ability and energy; and he tore into cases with a vim that was irresistible. I had asked him whether he knew anything about the law. I was soon laughing at myself.

Was there anything about the law that he didn't know! That fellow was a veritable encyclopedia. He seemed to have it all in his head. He became the brains of the office. I might well enough have burned my books. I began asking questions, and soon quit referring to my library. I found it was useless; all I got was a verification of his statements.

Naturally I prospered. We won the Huxly case hands down, although I knew it was Ebenezer's brain and not mine that did it.

Still, I got the credit, so I had no kick coming. Other

cases came our way. We won them all. It was so easy that it was amazing. I congratulated both myself and him.

"Fudge," he said. "It's nothing. There's nothing to the law but the knowing."

And I guess he was right. Anyway I was in high spirits. My reputation was bounding up. I became a boy again. Success breeds dreams. I could see great pictures ahead, if I could keep this genius at work; I would be chief justice!

The mystery?

It had grown so old that I was beginning to despair of it. I had, to be sure, a restless feeling, a sort of nervous certainty that it would be cleared up some day; but I had become so used to waiting that it had become a sort of habit; I was helpless and could do nothing, and there was only hope. Of one thing I was certain — Robinson would show up some day, somehow; a sort of subconscious wisdom seemed to tell me that.

Was it the mystery that held Ebenezer? It must have been: though what he was going to gain by sitting in my office, or how he was going to solve it by doing nothing, I could not make out. There was only one clue, and that was his resemblance to Rob. When I questioned him about it he always laughed.

"If I were Rob, I think you would know it, Hendricks. No,

no, boy, you're on the wrong track." Then, after a while, after a good many minutes of silence and thinking: "You'll have to wait, old boy. Only, I tell you, things may happen, and when they do, keep your wits about you."

But nothing happened in spite of his words.

DAYS WORE into weeks and weeks into months, and we dug into the laws. Ebenezer was at it early and late; and I did my best to keep up with him. I offered him a partnership, but he refused it. When I tried to have a moneyed understanding, he laughed at me.

"I have so much of that stuff that it nauseates me. I prefer to work for nothing and see what turns up."

He had no bad habits that I could notice, and I watched him closely. He always brought a bottle of port wine with him and drank it all during the day; that is, what I did not help him with. Also he smoked occasionally; only it was an old, seedy pipe, such as you would expect an Ebenezer Jones to smoke.

There was only one thing in his habits or possessions that could arouse my curiosity; that was a small case which he always carried with him; it was not more than three inches square and could be conveniently carried in his pocket. The first thing he did on entering

the office was to lock this in his desk. And when he left at night it went with him without fail. Once he opened it quite accidentally, and I noticed with surprise that it contained two small bottles, both of them full of a liquid, and that the color was of port wine.

They say it was Pandora who opened the box. Of a certainty that mythical young lady was an ancestor of mine. I can understand her feelings exactly; they must have been tantalizing. Something told me I must open that box. Of course I revolted against the feeling; I fought it fiercely; all the ethics of my nature and training warned me and pleaded with me.

It was no use. There was still that feeling, perverse and ever there. My fingers itched, and my heart yearned for that case.

Why I should have had it I could not tell; it was a freak of my own nature or the hand of Fate. My lower self seemed bound to triumph in this one case, although my integrity kept saying: *No, no; thou shalt not.*

"After all, what does it amount to?" I would repeat. "Merely a case and two bottles. Examine them and return them; no one will be harmed, and you will be satisfied."

Well, it went on that way for a good many days, and all the time I felt myself growing weaker. It was a trivial thing in it-

self; but the fight I put up against it made it, with me, a matter of some magnitude.

At length I came to it. I resolved to examine the case and in this way relieve myself of this everlasting torment. It was a simple thing in itself, and were it not for its strange aftermath I would soon have forgotten it.

IX

EBENEZER HAD stepped out of the office for a few minutes, leaving his desk unlocked. It was quickly done. I stepped over to his desk, drew out the drawer, and took therefrom the little case of mystery.

A slight pressure and the thing flew open, disclosing the two small bottles I knew it to contain. I remember wondering why the two bottles instead of one inasmuch as they contained the same liquid. But did they?

Perhaps they only looked alike. To satisfy myself I picked up one of the bottles, opened it, and smelled it. It had absolutely no odor, and of course I dared not taste it. It was full to the overflowing (and as my hand trembled somewhat, a drop fell in the wine-glass that was resting on the desk. I replaced the cork and was about to open the other bottle when footsteps in the hall — Ebenezer's feet — put a speedy end to my investigation.

In a minute I had closed the

case and resumed the seat at my own desk.

"Hello," said Ebenezer.

He placed his hat upon the desk and, taking the wine-glass, poured himself a large drink. Then in horror I recalled the spilled drop.

"Horrors! What is . . ."

No use for more; it was done.

At first he stood stark still, his hand raising wonderingly to his head and his eyes questioning; then his frame shook and his color began to change, first to a yellow, then to a dark green. He was the most uncanny thing I ever looked at, a being dropped from another planet.

"Mercy!" he exclaimed. "It is done!"

Then with a furious haste he tore open the desk and seized the case and vanished into the dressing-room. I could hear the lock crash as he turned the key. Then he fell; but he must have risen immediately, for I could hear someone walking. Then a voice — no, a cry, and how it rang!

"In the name of Heaven, Hendricks, open the door! It is I — Rob! Oh, before it is too late! Hurry, hurry, break it down!"

With a cry of fury I flung myself at the door. It held.

"Hurry, hurry!" came the despairing call from the other side. Then another voice cut in: "Shut

up and come here; I'm master yet."

Something fell, and then there was the tramping of many feet. A struggle seemed to be going on, and above it all the voice of men — not two nor three, but of a multitude. In the midst of my frantic haste I could hear it. Awful, excited, despairing, the incoherent shoutings of all nationalities. German, Greek, French, Italian. And above it all the voice of a master. "This way; this way! There now; there now!"

In a perfect frenzy of haste I seized an implement and splintered the door and, as it fell back, sprang into the room.

It was empty.

No, not quite.

Ebenezer Jones was standing at the window watching the street below.

"Why," he smiled, "you must be in a hurry, Mr. Hendricks. Do you always enter a room in this manner?"

Shamefaced and abashed I stood there, puzzled, a fool shown up in the height of his folly. I was about to become a hero; I came crashing through the door ready to grapple with a multitude, and instead I was laughed at. Humbly I drew my handkerchief and mopped my face.

"Excuse me, Mr. Jones," I ventured; "but I—I surely heard strange noises in this room."

"Strange what?"

"Noises."

"Tut, tut, Hendricks." He came over to me and laid his great brawny paw on my shoulder. "What noises did you hear?"

"Why," I said, "I heard, or thought I heard, my dear old friend Robinson. He was calling to me right in this room, begging me to open the door. And there were others — lots of them. You had the door locked, so I smashed it down."

"I see you did," picking it up and placing it against the wall. "But you didn't find Roh, did you? Nor the others? Just plain old Ebenezer Jones!" He laughed and slapped me on the back. "Just plain old Ebenezer Jones. What do you know about that? Isn't it awful?" And he went off into a peal of laughter, and laughed and laughed and laughed. "Hendricks," he said, "you should have seen yourself come through that door. Oh, how funny it was. You should have been a soldier; you'd be a general!"

And that is how it ended; humiliated, shamed, and doubting, laughed at and half laughing at myself, I returned to work. But I had a feeling that after all I was right, and not such a big fool as Ebenezer Jones would have me believe. And the feeling grew. It was not long before it became a conviction, and conviction brought action.

I began to see the light.

EBENEZER WENT to work as though nothing had happened. So did I. But now, after the peculiar experience through which I had gone, I began to take a new interest in my strange companion. For hours I watched him wondering and figuring.

I had taken him at first for a queer character, one of those strange personages of whom we have so many in our midst, who for a mere whim or for love of any kind of adventure will adapt themselves to any place or person in order to watch the course of events and be in on the denouement. That he had more than a curious interest in the disappearance of Rob I had not dreamed hitherto.

Once on a train of new thoughts I worked fast. Why his resemblance to Rob? Whence this almost uncanny knowledge of the law, this almost unhuman legal mind, which knew everything, and which cared so little for its rewards? Why his total dislike for money, society, and honor? Why, too — and I reasoned it over many, many times — the two small bottles?

And why — yes — the one bottle — one drop, the sudden effect, the noises, the multitude, and Rob?

It was not a nice feeling, to be sure; but just the same, far from being ashamed of what I had done, I was resolved on playing the same trick over again on the first opportunity.

From now on I watched and waited eagerly for the little packet of mystery. Once he took it from his pocket and was about to lay it on his desk when something diverted him, and he gave it a steady, studious look, something akin to wonderment, it seemed to me, and with a sudden strange motion snapped it back into his pocket.

Then he looked over at me. It was a strange look, something I could not understand; there was something of power and yet of a strange, terrible weakness.

All through that day and several more that followed there was a strange feeling between us, and at times I could feel his eyes upon me, a most uncomfortable thing. I had the impression of being feared and watched by a superior power; I don't know that there is anything more uncanny than that. With a weaker will you at least know that you are the master; but when a stronger begins to fear, the resultant fear that it engenders in you is so haunting and depressing that it becomes horrible.

Not that he was not the same Ebenezer. He was that, and he wasn't. The outward appearance and actions were the same; it was the psychology that changed. There was a shiftiness, a changing; the eye spoke a lie, and the personality seemed

to be fluttering. I don't know of anything that could have moved me more or set me to thinking harder. There was fear, appeal, and terror in those eyes. I felt that I was being called on and that action was needed.

"HALLUCINATION," say you?

So it seemed to me; but it was so real, so earnest, and I was so certain of it that nothing would have diverted me. What would I do, and how would I do it? There was that in those eyes which told me I could do something. I was convinced that the scene in the dressing-room was a reality.

There were, there must have been many people in that room. It was Ebenezer's secret, and it should be mine. Show a man that which he can't have; and that he shall have. There was but one way — the bottles. I would try them again.

As I said, to all outward appearances Ebenezer was the same. He had the ability, the joviality, the personality. It was only in the shifting individuality of the eyes with their appeal, their fear, and the resultant effects that he was at all different from the first Ebenezer that had entered my office.

His manners were the same, his talk and his application; he still drank his bottle of port, and he still went out for walks. Each morning he deposited the little

case inside his desk, and every time as regularly as he went out, it went with him.

How I did watch that case! How I did want to lay my hands on it! But there was no use; I could not take it away from him; I must work in secret.

One morning, a very momentous one to me, Ebenezer was late. He had a right, to be sure; for who has not when he works for nothing? However, he had always been so prompt before that I noticed with surprise this one slip of punctuality; and I was more surprised, nay, almost alarmed, when he jarred open the door.

There was an appearance of one who had been out all night; his eyes were bloodshot and his hair had a sort of stand-up-and-refuse-to-lie-down look, although it had been well flattened with the brush. In one hand he carried a bottle of port; in the other I noted with surprise the case.

Without noticing me — we were always very cordial with our greetings — he walked up to his desk more like a soldier than anything and deposited thereon the bottle and the case.

"There, now," he said, and without another word turned on his heel and marched out of the room.

A few moments later I saw him entering a building on the other side of the street. There was an act of finality about it

that startled me; a sort of defiance that unnerved me.

Was it a challenge? Anyway, there was the case.

WITH A feverishness that was a mixture of fear, hope, and eagerness I pressed open the cover. There they were, the two of them. Small, small receptacles of mystery: What did they not contain?

My hand trembled and my mind blurred. Here was one of the mysteries of the world; a secret of many things.

And I — I must see, must hear, and must know. I held them up and examined them.

"Ah," I muttered, as by inspiration, "the dose and the antidote. Ebenezer, this is your Waterloo. See." I almost laughed with glee. "One drop raised hell. Two drops will raise more hell." I poured two drops in his glass. "So. And now, old boy, I'll say checkmate."

With this I took out the other bottle and placed it in my pocket. Then I replaced the first bottle and put the case where I had found it. When all was ready I returned to my desk and took up my work.

What a difference there was. On the former occasion I was all excitement and guilt; I felt I had committed a crime and was ashamed of myself. I had lost all honor and self-respect. And now, although excited, I had a feeling of triumph, of certainty,

of right. I was dead sure. I was the instrument of Providence. And I remembered Ebenezer's own words.

"Things may happen; and when they do, keep your wits about you."

Well, I had them about me, now. Also, I had a hammer to batter down the door if necessary.

After what seemed an age, Ebenezer returned. "Well," he said, "how's things?"

"Fine," I answered.

"That's good. Same here. Was out late last night; first time for a long while."

"Theater?" I asked.

"Oh, no. Just going around. Made me sleep late, though. Actually, I thought this morning I could sleep for a hundred years. Have some?" He produced his bottle and poured himself a good drink.

"Not this morning."

I was hoping he would not insist.

"Well, here goes."

He held it up, eyed it for a moment, and then drank it at a gulp.

"So," I said, and raised from my seat. "So!"

It was just as I expected. He turned sickly and was powerless. The two drops had done the business. His eyes were — Heavens, what eyes they were! The most unholy thing I had ever gazed into — cavernous, burning — defiant; the eyes of a

lost soul at the bar of judgment. He raised his hands to the sides of his head.

"At last!" he said. "At last!"

And, oh, the finality of those four words; the despair!

Then, with furious haste, he tore open his case. Like a fleeting thing his hand went around inside. It was not there!

"Good Heavens!" he murmured, drawing back. "This is murder!"

And in a flash of thought he was in the dressing-room.

X

"HENDRICKS!"

The cry came out. Bob's voice! Something fell.

A terrific struggle was going on; all hell seemed to be breaking loose. I made for the door with the speed of fury. It seemed an age. From inside came the old voice, the master's voice, and it said: "I'll kill you!"

And, oh, the struggle! There were blows and hate, and above all the screaming staccato of many tongues. Hatred, despair, revenge.

Bang!

I let the door have it right in the center. It shivered and caved, the middle part demolished. *Bang!* I struck at the hinges. With a crash it fell to the floor, and over it I sprang into the room.

As I live I shall never see it again! The room was full of hu-

manity. Naked and struggling they were rolled into an inextricable mass. There was hissing and gnashing of teeth. And in the center in the midst of it all was a horrible thing. It was battling the multitude. Such a struggle I had never seen before. It heaved, fought, shoved, and struck, and still they came on. If it were not master it was giving a good account of itself.

Suddenly, by a gigantic effort, it raised itself up, flung back its assailants like so many flies, and made straight for me. Two eyes — a monstrous thing. "You!" it hissed.

WITH a cry of horror I backed against the wall. Its hand touched me and I felt my body grow cold as ice.

"Not yet!"

A form flashed between us and a hand grasped its throat. It was Robinson.

"Back, Hen! Back! As you value your life, back!"

Then he sailed into it. Their forms buckled together, heaved and tossed into the air. They passed in and out of each other like mist. The others came to help, but their actions were slow and aged.

Such a struggle I shall never see again. I can see myself yet, crouched against the wall watching that battle of phantoms. I was too bewildered to be afraid, too horrified to analyze. As in a

dream I was passive, unable even to think.

Suddenly there was a heaving and tossing, and the form of Rob shot into the air. He and the thing were locked together. When they came down Rob was on top. The battle was over. The thing lay still, Rob backed away.

"Behold the end of Azev Avec."

It shuddered and rolled over and lifted up its head. I saw it was akin to a man, only black and terribly aged. It seemed to be shriveling. From its ghastly mouth came a sound. "Robinson," it said.

Rob stepped closer and then knelt down. "What is it, Azev?" His face grew kind and pitying. One could see that if he had resentment, it was buried in pity for what had to be done.

"Goodby, Robinson. You win. You were too strong. All's yours now. I should have picked someone with a weaker will. It was a great fight. No resentment, no hard feeling. Live ten thousand years! Almost immortal!"

All the time his form was shriveling and his voice growing fainter.

"There now," said Rob, drawing away. "Doreen, come on."

From out of the mass of shadows stepped a form.

"Now then, Hen, open the door and into your office. There, now."

We were alone. The three of us.

"Now, take that other bottle, pour two drops for me in port wine. There, now. Give it to me."

I held it to his lips and he drank it at a gulp. The effect was immediate and astonishing. His appearance lost its phantom shadowiness, and he became real and human, a man of flesh and blood.

I almost danced with joy. I seized him by the hand and fairly blubbered with my happiness.

"And now give me the bottle."

He took it from me, and with a steady hand prepared a dose for his shadow friend.

"Behold us," said Rob, standing by the side of Doreen. "The two mysteries. The two solutions. Now let's look at the others."

He stepped to the dressing-room door and beckoned me. The room was empty.

"Where are they?" I asked.

"They were dead long ago," he answered. "Their minds and souls were alive. They were imprisoned and feeding on the body of Doreen and myself. Come into the office and I will tell you all.

"THERE, NOW," he said, when he had rested himself, "I will make it as short as I can, as Doreen and I both want clothes, and we both want to go out into

the freedom of the street. Do you remember what you said about the doctor? You were right. He was a vampire. For ten thousand years he had been feeding on human flesh. His real name was Azev Avec. Dr. Runson was merely a composite — so was Ebenezer Jones.

"About ten thousand years ago, somewhere south of the Himalayas, Azev was born, the son of a high priest and an Indian princess his wife. His father was a man deeply immersed in the occult, and gained an almost uncanny knowledge of the natural laws. Among other things, he acquired a knowledge of solids; he early discovered, what we all know now, that no solid is really what the name implies; but a mass of infinitesimal particles held together in a single mass by two forces of nature, cohesion and adhesion.

"Knowledge like this was to a man of his nature and profession only an incentive for tremendous endeavor. The remainder of his life was spent with one object — the control of the particles of a solid, or to be precise, some means by which man might control and manipulate the forces of cohesion. He himself did not succeed; but on his death passed his work and knowledge on to his son Azev.

"Now, Azev added to his father's knowledge, a poetic foresight. He saw that, with this

power, simply by increasing the space between the particles, a solid would become a mist and that one could pass through fire, stone, or water without danger and with the same ease with which one swarm of gnats passes through another.

"He worked hard, and he succeeded; but when success came he found that he was an old man, and that life had passed without his enjoying any of its pleasures. The thought terrified him; he hated to die without at least one great splurge of pleasure. But to enjoy pleasure he must have youth, and that had passed long, long before. Then the devil spoke:

"If you have no youth, you can get it. Steal it. Of what use is all this learning and knowledge if you are going to die?"

The idea appealed, and Azev looked around him. He selected a young man about twenty years of age, beautiful, strong and athletic, and invited him to supper. At a favorable moment he passed him the draft, and while his body was in the misty state entered and took possession. After taking the antidote their bodies became one.

"There were two minds; but Azev's was so much the stronger that the other soon became a negligible thing, a mere occasional whim. Thus was Faust antedated by about nine thousand eight hundred years. Azev

found himself a young man again, thirty years of age, strong and healthy.

"A career of hedonism followed. In a few years the body was soft and flabby, so he stole another, and so on. When he was in danger of death he merely took on another form. It worked like a charm. Sometimes he went in for pleasure, sometimes for learning, sometimes for wealth. He became probably the richest and most learned man on earth.

"He hobnobbed with kings and emperors. Alexander the Great sent for him on his death bed; and had he arrived in time the great Macedonian would never have died at thirty-three. Caesar was his friend: Virgil his confidant. He witnessed the birth of Christianity. He chummed with Nero, and by the lurid light of burning Christians saw the religion of Europe spring into its youth.

"Down through the ages he went, always enjoying himself,

and always in someone else's body. He was the Merlin of King Arthur. He was the body servant of Barbarossa, and he alone of all the earth knew the sleeping-place of him of the long red beard.

"He stood a fair chance of living forever. There were but two chances against him, fatal accidents and the absorption of a will stronger than his own. So long as his will was the strongest he ruled the body. Allen Doreen was nearly his equal; I was slightly his superior. It took me five years of terrific struggle to gain any advantage at all. Then I warned you.

"Another struggle and I associated with you, placed opportunities in your way, enticed you deliberately with the bottles, and you caught on.

"Here I am. I am Robinson again; but I am much more.

"All of Azev Avec's wealth is mine; likewise his learning and wisdom.

"Now get us some clothes."

"TRICON, the 24th World Science Fiction Convention," writes Ben Jason, Chairman, "will be held September 2, 3, 4, and 5, 1966, at the Sheraton-Cleveland Hotel in Cleveland, Ohio. Membership is \$1 for overseas fans; \$2 (plus \$1 if you attend) for all others. Make checks payable to: 24 World Science Fiction Convention, P.O. Box 1372, Cleveland, Ohio 44103. Toastmaster will be Isaac Asimov, and the Guest of Honor is L. Sprague de Camp, author of *Lost Darkness Fall*, *Genus Homo*, *The Science Fiction Handbook*, and many others."

It Is Written . . .

THE BIG NEWS this time, as you may have noticed on the 2nd cover, is the inauguration of our companion magazine, *STARTLING MYSTERY STORIES*. While this publication is restricted to mystery tales, we are stressing the eerie, bizarre, and strange type of mystery, rather than the mundane crime story (however excellent) to be found in other magazines of this caliber. Thus you will find not a few authors and types of story quite in line with some of the content of *MAGAZINE OF HORROR*.

H. P. Lovecraft, Robert Bloch, August Derleth, and Seabury Quinn need no introduction to you. They are represented with *The Lurking Fear*, *House of the Hatchet*, *Ferguson's Capsules*, and *The Mansion of Unholy Magic*. Derleth's story is a new one, and Quinn's offers his famous detective, Jules de Grandin. Edward D. Hoch is with us, with an account of his quite different detective, Simon Ark; Gerald W. Page offers a new story, *The Off-Season*; we have the outre case of *The Awful Injustice*, by S. B. H. Hurst; and, since the comparison between Poe and Lovecraft has been made so often, we thought it might be well to precede HPL's story by a short one of EAP's. Reading *The Tell-Tale Heart* just before *The Lurking Fear* makes for particular interest, even if you have read both stories before, as we had ourselves. And, as is ever the case, there will be those readers for whom one or both stories will be new.

GRAY MORROW's cover for our Winter issue received just about universal approval from you, the readers. Of the two who said they did not like the cover, neither, it turned out, actually disliked the picture — they just thought that the new logo was no improvement. A larger number thought that the new logo was an improvement, but urged us to keep on experimenting. As I type this now, I do not know what you will know when you read this — whether we retained the logo we used last time, or decided to try another experiment.

BECAUSE OF THE long lag between the present issue and the last (a lag which we hope will not be so great between the present issue and number 14) we can give you reckonings on both the November and the Winter issues. This was the most fascinating issue to "score" yet, because of the way first one, then another story came in to first place.

Call of the Mech-Men was the first to be rated number one; it held this position for a while; gave way to *The Empty Zoo*; resumed first place; tied with, then gave way to, the Hoch story again; resumed uncontested first place; then tied, and later gave way to *Rattle of Bones*.

Rattle of Bones held first place through many ballots; gave way to *The Devil's Pool*; tied with this story; resumed first place, then gave way to a tie between the La Spina's

novel and a new surge for *Call of the Mech-Men*.

Thus, first place was hotly contended among four stories; you'll see what the final results were in *The Reckoning*.

"At last! a cover worthy of the contents of MOH," writes Franklin J. C. Hiller of Rochester, New York. "At last! a cover that doesn't look as though it were a weak, misguided attempt to steal readers away from *WEN HOBSON FICINOW* in the lowest depths of its sado-masochistic stage. If you had started Volume One, Number One with this type of cover, I have a very strong hunch (just an uninformed opinion, really, or frankly, a guess) that you would have a higher readership figure by this time.

"The new logotype I like. I cannot say if I would prefer it over some other logotype without seeing some other logotypes, but I certainly do prefer it to that gaudy-gory-thud-and-blunder monstrosity you did have on MOH."

Thank you, Mr. Hiller, and thanks to all those many others of you who wrote in to express approval of the cover and logotype before reading the stories. We received so many of such letters that we began to wonder if anyone was going to comment on the contents at all. It was some weeks before the votes on stories began coming in!

And while we are thanking loyal readers, we want to thank especially, that veteran lover of imaginative fiction, *FORREST J. ACKERMAN*, who donated a copy of the rare October 1932 issue of *STRANGE TALES*, so that we could re-read it, see if there were any stories therein that seemed right for revival in MOH (some of you requested some material from this issue), and then see what we could do about using such stories.

I also wish to thank the reader (alas, I forgot to take down this

name) who phoned me and offered the loan of all copies of *ST* we did not have. Since he had just acquired a set (fortunate man!) and I suspected (correctly) that he had not had time properly to savor, let alone to read them, I told him that we would need a long-term loan, which was quite true at the time. Since then, another helpful reader has offered to supply us with photocopies of the contents of *ST*, so that we would need the original magazines only long enough to read them and decide which stories we would want photocopies of. So we are interested in short-term loans of the following issues of *STRANGE TALES*: March 1932, June 1932, and January 1933.

However, I am still desirous of purchasing copies of these issues for keeps.

Praising the cover, but complaining of the contents of MOH on the grounds that they "smack too much of science fiction" and that "the book stores are loaded with those kind of stories", Mrs. Joseph Behr thanks us for the review of Bernhard J. Hurwood's *Monsters Galore*, adding, "Now you told us the price but not where to send for it." The only help we can offer is to say that *Monsters Galore* is a Fawcett Gold Medal Book, published by Fawcett Publications, Inc., Greenwich, Conn. Unfortunately, some pocketbook publishers do not give their complete addresses; but there's a chance that an order sent to the address above would reach them. (Or possibly a local newsdealer handles Gold Medal Books and could be of assistance.)

Richard Minter, 901 S. Fieldcrest Road, Draper, North Carolina, 27241, writes, "Just read your comment on possible sources of supply for old issues of the greatest of the old pulps — *WEND TALES* I have quite a few of the issues of the 1930's; a few

Coming Next Issue

"... I left Mogador more than a year ago and came through the foothills of the Atlas ranges, striking out into the desert in hopes of finding some of the Carthaginian ruins the North African deserts are known to hold.

I spent months in the search, traveling among the squalid Arab villages, now near an oasis and now far into the black, untracked desert. And as I went farther into that savage country, I found more and more of the ruins I sought, crumbled remnants of temples and fortresses, relics, almost destroyed, of the age when Carthage meant empire and ruled all of North Africa from her walled city. And then, on the side of a massive block of stone, I found that which turned me toward Igidi.

It was an inscription in the garbled Phœnician of the traders of Carthage, short enough so that I remembered it and can repeat it word for word. . . .

"Merchants, go not into the city of Mamurth, which lies beyond the mountain pass. For I, San-Drabt of Carthage, entering the city with four companions in the month of Euchmoun, to trade, on the third night of our stay came priests and seized my fellows, I escaping by hiding. My companions they sacrificed to the evil god of the city, who has dwelt there from the beginning of time, and for whom the wise men of Mamurth have built a great temple, the like of which is not on earth elsewhere, where the people of Mamurth worship their god. I escaped from the city and set this warning here that others may not turn their steps to Mamurth and to death."

Don't miss this bizarre tale, the first-published story of an author whom many of you have requested

THE MONSTER-GOD OF MAMURTH

by EDMOND HAMILTON

and, among many other items, we hope to offer you

THE LAIR OF THE STAR-SPAWN

by August Derleth

A powerful tale of cosmic horror, which you have requested.

P R O O F

by S. Fowler Wright

A gruesome and ironic tale, which we believe has not appeared in magazines before.

earlier. I will send a list to anyone who requests same and includes a stamp for reply."

"Thanks for publishing my brief *Memoirs of HPL*," writes Mrs. Muriel E. Eddy of 688 Prairie Avenue, Providence, Rhode Island 02905, "in the Winter 1965/66 issue, and thanks to readers who've written me how much they liked it. As my husband (Clifford Eddy) and I knew this master of weird fiction so well, I had some photos of HPL copied, so that I can send them (as mementos) to sincere Lovecraft fans. To those who care to send me a self-addressed, stamped envelope, regular size, I'll send a picture. . . . Call on me, if you wish. We have even had a caller from Sweden and two from England, wishing information on HPL, which we gave to them gladly. We still remember how HPL loved ice-cream and hated fish! I still have a chair HPL's aunt (now gone) gave to me when HPL left Providence to marry Sonia Creemo in New York. I used to own the folding bed HPL slept in (his aunt also gave it to me) until one night it collapsed on me! His aunt gave me many souvenirs of HPL which I cherish — those I have left — after all these years. Memories of HPL will never cease!

"Glad to see so many fine stories in the Winter issue. I believe that *Master Nicholas*, by Seabury Quinn, was my favorite. *The Faceless God*, by Robert Bloch, was a close second."

Malcolm Willets, who runs the Collectors Book Store, 1717 Wilcox Avenue, Hollywood 28, California, writes to tell us, "A friend and I started this store nine months ago. We rent-

ed an entire building here in Hollywood, remodeled it inside and out, put in wall-to-wall carpeting and glass showcases. . . . Our downstairs room is devoted to science fiction, and I would say that we have 90% of all the science fiction magazines published since 1926, and 85% of the *Weird Tales* from Jan. 1927 on. We also have *STRANGE TALES*, though only two copies of the first issue at the moment. We try to sell fine condition material only."

Stuart Schaff writes, "I found Steinbeck's piece to be very pleasant as a change of pace. Please, more like that for variety.

"Since most of the readers seem to like Chambers' writing, I think it appropriate that they should be made aware of the reprinting of his *The King in Yellow* by Ace Books (#M-132, 45¢)."

We had planned to mention this, Friend Schaff, but see no reason to cheat you out of mentioning it. We'll add to your notice only that the address of Ace Books is 1120 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10036, and that this is the complete edition of the book.

"I'm glad to see that you've improved your cover design," writes Daniel R. Mercer on the back of a preference page. "One of your readers in the Winter edition voiced the opinion that science fiction has no place in your magazine. I disagree. Science fiction can be very frightening, as shown by William Hodgesson's *The Derelict*."

Thus the controversy continues. We wonder if one side will ever convince the other. RAWL.

Have You Missed Any of Our Previous Issues?

Many readers have asked us if back issues of MAGAZINE OF HORROR are still available. The answer is — yes, for the time being, they are; but some issues are not so plentiful as they were. While they last, they can all be had for the cover price of 50c per copy, postpaid.

Aug. 1953: The Man With A Thousand Legs by Frank Belknap Long; The Yellow Sign by Robert W. Chambers; The Unbeliever by Robert Silverberg; The Last Dawn by Frank Lillie Pollock; Babylon 70 M. by Donald A. Wellheim; The Maze and the Monster by Edward D. Hoch.

Nov. 1953: Clarissa by Robert A. W. Lowndes; The Space-Eaters by Frank Belknap Long; The Chamer by Archie Bliss; The Faceless Thing by Edward D. Hoch; The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes by Rudyard Kipling; The Electric Chair by George Wright.

Feb. 1954: The Seeds of Death by David H. Keller; The Repeler of Reputations by Robert W. Chambers; The Place of the Pythons by Arthur J. Barker; The Seeking Thing by Janet Hirsch; They That Wait by H. S. W. Gibbett; Jean Seuchen by S. Barings-Gould; Lullula Miller by Mary Wilkins-Freeman.

May 1954: SORRY, ALL GONE!

Sept. 1954: Cassius by Henry S. Whitehead; The Ghostly Rental by Henry James; The House of the Worm by Mervyn Peake; Five-Year Contract by J. Vernon Shaw; The Morning the Birds Forgot to Sing by Walt Lischner; Bones by Donald A. Wellheim.

Nov. 1954: Caverns of Horror by Laurence Manning; The Mask by Robert W. Chambers; The Pacer by August Derleth; The Life-After-Death of Mr. Thaddeus Wards by Robert Barbour Johnson; The Deer to Saturn by Clark Ashton Smith; The Moth by H. G. Wells.

Jan. 1955: The Shattered Room by H. P. Lovecraft and August Derleth; The Phantom Farmhouse by Saxbury Quinn; The Thing From Outside by George Allan England; Black Thing at Midnight by Joseph Payne Brennan; The Shadows on the Wall by Mary Wilkins-Freeman; The Chilling Box by Edgar Allan Poe.

Apr. 1955: The Dead Who Walk by Ray Cummings; The Hand of Glory by R. H. D. Barham; The Black Laugh by William J. Makin; Orpheus's Brother by John Brunner; The Burglar-Proof Vault by Oliver Taylor; Jack by Reynold Junker.

June 1955: The Whistling Room by William Hope Hodgson; Skulls in the Stars by Robert E. Howard; The Distortion out of Space by Francis Flagg; The Night Wire by H. F. Arnold; Sacrilege by Wallace West.

Aug. 1955: The Clock of Madness by Saxbury Quinn; Flacide's Will by Kirk Mashburn; The Torture of Hope, by Villiers de L'Isle-Adam; The Girl at Heddon's by Pauline Kappell Prinnick; Come Closer by Joanna Russ; The Tree by Gerald W. Page; The Plagues of the Living Dead by A. Hyatt Verrill.

Nov. 1955: The Devil's Pool by Grege La Spina; Rattle of Bones by Robert E. Howard; Call of the Mech-Men by Laurence Manning; Under the Mau Tree by Katherine Yates; Was It A Dream? by Guy de Maupassant; A Psychological Shipwreck by Ambrose Bierce.

Winter 55-56: See next page.

Back Issue Page



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Jan 1949

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